

# ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



CIRCUMSTANCES  
*by Charles King Van Riper*

10¢  
A COPY

JULY 17

\$4.00  
A YEAR



## The Gloves of a Thousand Uses

**R**AILROADERS, teamsters, builders, motormen, farmers, packers, movers, janitors, linemen, deck-hands, plasterers, street cleaners, gardeners, ash collectors, stone masons, pilots, painters, truck drivers, lumbermen,

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a Fair Price*

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My shipping point is.....

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Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book— "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reasons and the Remedy," your descriptive catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation or Business.....

This coupon not valid unless mailed and postmarked before midnight, Jan. 31, 1920.

# THE ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

VOL. CXXIII

Number 2

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# THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXXIII

SATURDAY, JULY 17, 1920

No. 2



## Circumstances by Charles King Van Riper

### CHAPTER I.

#### MURDER?

IT was Sunday morning that the woman who lived next door to old Mrs. Spalding, in Maple Street, remarked to her husband that she hadn't seen their neighbor for three days.

"That's strange, isn't it?" observed the man, who knew that when the weather was fair the little old lady never failed to spend most of her mornings working in the garden around the rose-covered cottage.

"I believe I'll run over and see if she's all right," the wife announced.

It was not until the woman had started on her errand that the man remembered that his sleep had been disturbed three nights before by the barking of a dog. He had been so tired that he had not fully wakened, and it had been forgotten in the morning, to be recalled only now that his wife had suggested that possibly Mrs. Spalding was not well. But the barking of a dog—surely nothing like that had happened. The man went on with the reading of his paper.

Within three minutes his wife was back.

"I'm afraid something's wrong with Mrs. Spalding," she said breathlessly.

The way the woman looked brought her husband to his feet.

"The doors are locked," she went on, "and the shades are all drawn. I listened, and there wasn't a sound inside the house."

Within twenty minutes a policeman was on his way to investigate. People from across the street and further along the block had joined the next-door neighbors, and were waiting in front of the little cottage when the policeman arrived.

None of them had seen Mrs. Spalding since Thursday morning—in fact, one woman, whose husband was a traveling salesman, said positively Mrs. Spalding hadn't appeared all day Wednesday.

Another neighbor remembered having heard the dog barking Thursday night. But it was the man who lived in the corner house who advanced the speculation to a more exciting pitch. He told of having seen two shabbily dressed men talking on the sidewalk in the shadows beyond the street lamp. Just after the householder noticed them one man turned the corner and started down Maple Street. The citizen saw him pass under the light.

Not liking the looks of the men, the man who lived in the corner house had telephoned to the police.

"When I got back to the window," he concluded, "the other fellow was shuffling off down Crescent Avenue."

The policeman looked around at the group gathered on the sidewalk. He was wise enough not to ask them if any one had heard blood-curdling cries or shots, but he wondered just the same if some of them wouldn't imagine even more complete details if given a little encouragement.

The woman whose husband was a traveling salesman had just begun: "Now that I think of it—"

"You say the doors are locked?" asked the policeman, opening the gate.

Several of the neighbors answered "Yes," and all followed as he started up the path with borders of pansies, ragged sailors, and bachelor's buttons beyond the edging of brick.

It was not the first time this particular policeman had been sent out to investigate a case of the kind. He tried to force the door with his shoulder, found it didn't yield, and, looking around, saw a fence-post lying beside the woodshed. The door burst open at the third blow of the battering-ram. Past the policeman and the neighbors bounded a scrawny cat. The animal wavered uncertainly as it struck the path, but recovered and scooted out of sight.

The little kitchen and living-room was spick and span, but in the shadows of a far corner lay the little old lady, face down. And beside her crouched her dog, a tan-and-white terrier. The policeman expected the dog to spring, but it just watched him, its eyes two burning fires in the dim light.

"Stand back, all of you!" directed the policeman, and stepped into the room. The dog never moved, its eyes on the advancing intruder. Now the policeman had almost reached the body.

Without a sound the dog flew at him, the policeman stumbling back in time to escape its snapping fangs. The dog fell rather than landed from the spring, but struggled up to his feet as the policeman backed toward the door. Instead of following up the attack, the dog retreated to the side of the body. The policeman advanced again, this time with his revolver in readiness.

The breathless neighbors waiting outside heard the crash of a shot. The drummer's wife screamed, another woman fainted. The bolder spirits pressed close and peered in at the door through which a pungent whisp of smoke was drifting.

The man from the corner house saw the policeman looking down at an inert huddle of tan and white.

"Poor old fellow," said the policeman, "you couldn't do the old lady any good."

Then the officer turned from the body of the starved dog to that of its mistress. He knelt, but there was no need of disturbing the body. He could see that the skin at the left temple had been broken, and there was dried blood on the flesh.

Looking over his shoulder, the policeman said: "She's dead. Would one of you mind calling the county physician?"

The woman whose husband was a traveling salesman rushed off to telephone.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE OTHER GIRL.

A YOUNG doctor, Philip Brent, was the acting county physician, the old practitioner who held the appointment being at the time incapacitated through illness.

As Brent hung up the receiver of the telephone he frowned at the card on which he had written: "Mrs. Emily Spalding, 81 Maple Street." The name was vaguely familiar. "Maple Street?" He remembered now.

There was a little cottage, an old lady, a cat, a tan-and-white puppy, and a parrot. He remembered especially the parrot.

Several years before, one of his first calls, Dr. Brent had been summoned there to attend a young girl who was dying—a girl named Elsie. The physician remembered the name because of the parrot.

When the doctor entered the house the bird had screamed: "What's the matter! What's the matter! What's the matter!"

It had startled him, but the girl's condition was too acute for him to think of anything else. Within an hour the girl died. As Brent led the little old lady from the room of death the parrot called: "Go

to school, Bob! Go to school, Bob!" It made the doctor shudder.

In filling out the death-certificate Mrs. Spalding had told him the girl's name was Elsie.

"Elsie Spalding?" he asked. The old lady nodded.

"Married?" The doctor corrected himself. "Of course not." And after Elsie "Spalding" he wrote: "Single."

Just then the parrot began to call the dead girl's name:

"Elsie, Elsie, El-sie!" mimicked the bird. "El-s-i-e, where are you?"

The thing was positively uncanny.

"Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!" coaxed the parrot, then called again, irritably: "El-sie!"

Dr. Brent completed the death-certificate hastily and picked up his hat and black leather case.

As he passed through the door the parrot cried triumphantly: "Go to school, Bob! Go to school, Bob!"

The thing wasn't easily forgotten.

Dr. Brent had called back the day after the funeral to see how little old Mrs. Spalding was keeping up. He found her none too well, but the parrot, and he was thankful, was silenced by a screen of newspapers around its cage.

"Mrs. Spalding, I think it would be well to get rid of the parrot," suggested the doctor.

"Get rid of Polly!" exclaimed Mrs. Spalding in horror, and Brent was sorry he had spoken.

"Why, I couldn't get along without old Polly," protested the little gray lady.

Brent had intended to speak of the dangerous effect that the bird's senseless repetition of the dead girl's name might have on Mrs. Spalding's nerves—calling ghosts, that's what it was! But the old lady was so appalled at the mere mention of disposing of the parrot that the physician shifted to another subject.

Now, several years later, he was on his way back to the house. The woman who had summoned him had said murder, but his informant was unmistakably excited. As the physician climbed into his car he wondered if the parrot would still be there.

Dr. Brent would have had no difficulty in identifying the house even if he had not remembered it. Two women and a man were standing on the sidewalk by the gate and watching anxiously along the street. As his car glided in toward the curb one of the women rushed up the path to the rear of the house.

When the acting county physician got around to the back of the cottage, the neighbors were prepared for him. The traveling salesman's wife had announced his arrival.

"Everything's just as I found it," explained the policeman, "except that I had to shoot the dog. He wouldn't let me go near the body."

"And the cat got away," put in the drummer's wife.

"How about the parrot?" asked the doctor.

"I didn't see any parrot," replied the policeman.

"She had one," chorused the neighbors, and the policeman corrected his statement by saying: "Yes, I see the cage over there in the corner, but—" The policeman crossed the room to investigate.

"The bird's there, too," he announced, "but starved like the cat and the dog. It's lying on the bottom of the cage."

Dr. Brent was examining the body. He looked around sharply as the buzz of talk outside increased.

The policeman anticipated the doctor's request, and closed the door, removing the battered lock that was swinging from a pair of loosened screws.

After an examination of the wound, the doctor rose and looked around thoughtfully. Then he stepped toward the table. His first theory was right. Three gray hairs were stuck by some dark substance against the corner of the table.

Again Dr. Brent looked around the room. Except for the bodies of old Mrs. Spalding and the dog the doctor had remembered as a puppy it was in perfect order. Not a thing had been disturbed.

The policeman was watching the acting county physician. Their eyes met.

"Natural causes?" suggested the policeman.

"Or accident," replied the doctor. "It's

hard to tell whether she stumbled against the table or was taken with heart disease and hit the table in falling."

"The neighbors are going to be considerably disappointed," observed the policeman.

But the neighbors already had other things to think of.

An automobile had stopped in front of the house and a girl in a tweed suit had stepped out.

"It's her!" whispered the neighbors.

The girl opened the gate, the chauffeur behind her lugging two suit-cases. Her face bright with happiness, eyes shining at the sight of the little old cottage, she started up the path.

Then she saw the people gathered there—the frightened faces. She stopped.

None of the neighbors spoke or moved until, as Dr. Brent was opening the door, the wife of the traveling salesman darted toward the bewildered girl.

"It's her daughter," whispered the man from the next house to the doctor, who, although he could not see the girl, sensed that some one had arrived.

"Her daughter—" Then it occurred to Brent, who had been thinking of Elsie, that Mrs. Spalding might have had another daughter.

There was a cry of "Mother!" from beyond the corner of the cottage.

Dr. Brent turned away and started for the street around the other side of the house. He was still a very young doctor, and there were certain situations, especially where women were concerned, in which he could not act—well, quite professionally.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THROUGH THE WINDOW.

**P**HILIP BRENT had an arduous time of it that day. He had built up a considerable private practise, and besides the death in Maple Street there was another case that required his attention as the substitute county physician. A tramp had fallen under a train in the railroad-yard. The law required that he view the body and report his finding.

It was not until eight o'clock that evening that he reached his home, an old-fashioned house in the center of town with an old colored mammy in charge. Jewel had come north from Virginia with Philip Brent's mother, and had been Brent's nurse. Now she presided over his establishment, directing the help, and ruling young Dr. Brent by the divine right of having been his childhood nurse.

When mammy, in her old cap, had opened the door, she said: "That Mr. Pendleton called up and say for you to call him on de phone soon as you come in." Pendleton was the county prosecutor.

Brent started for the telephone.

"Where you goin', chile?" demanded Jewel, catching his arm.

"Going to telephone," he explained.

"When you ain't eaten a mouthful!"

"All right," laughed Brent. "Have Amy send something in; I'll be ready for it."

Brent found Pendleton's wire was busy. He had time to attend to the food mammy jealously served herself before the operator rang to tell him he could have Pendleton's number.

"You went out on the case of a Mrs. Spalding this morning?" asked the prosecutor.

"Yes."

"What did you find?"

"Either the old lady fell and hit her head," said Brent, "or it was heart disease."

"No sign of violence?"

"On the body? Absolutely none."

"How about the room?"

"Everything in order," Brent assured the prosecutor; then demanded: "Say, what are you driving at?"

"Just this, doctor," Pendleton explained, "Mrs. Spalding's daughter tells me that money that her mother always kept behind a loose brick back of the stove is gone."

"So!" exclaimed Brent.

Then Pendleton said: "I wish you'd join Miss Spalding and me at the house in Maple Street in half an hour. That will give us time to get in from Ridgewood."

Brent's car and Pendleton's swung in simultaneously from opposite ends of the block.

"A neighbor from across the street stayed at the house," explained Miss Spalding. "Her husband is away—a traveling man."

It was too dark for Brent to see her, but it seemed to him he had heard the voice before. He tried to place it as she continued: "I'm taking you around to the back of the house because it happened there." They started along the path.

Brent, following Pendleton, realized that the girl had a remarkable voice, low, sweet, and rich. And he admired tremendously the self-possession that made it possible for her to seem so assured under such difficult circumstances.

They were at the kitchen door now, and a moment later inside, in the light.

"Miss Spalding," explained Pendleton, "this is Dr. Brent—"

"Why—er—er," stammered Brent when he found himself facing a girl with Irish blue eyes and the softly colored oval of her face framed by dark, warmly lustrous hair.

The girl smiled faintly.

"You're—why, you're Peggy Archer!" blurted Brent. Pendleton started at the name, and looked around to see the girl nod.

"On the stage," she said quietly.

"I knew you looked like some one I'd seen," said Pendleton.

Brent confessed to having attended two performances of "The Distant Shore." As a matter of fact he had seen it four times—and had a fifth ticket in his pocket even then. It is doubtful, however, if Brent could have given a coherent account of the play. But he could have discoursed endlessly on its star, Peggy Archer. And here he was meeting her face to face.

The girl had turned to the woman from across the way. "It was so good of you to stay," she said.

The traveling man's wife struggled to make an offer of staying on—the presence of Pendleton and Brent hinted of developments that ought not to be missed. But Peggy Archer, Miss Spalding was pleasantly but firmly overpowering. Finally the neighbor was dislodged.

As the girl turned from the door, Brent thought that just for an instant she looked very tired. But she smiled bravely when she found him looking at her.

"Where is the parrot?" he asked. The cage was no longer in the room.

"The woman next door took it."

Pendleton, who had been making a general survey of the kitchen, faced Brent.

"Now, then, describe it to me, doctor," said Pendleton. Brent explained how the body had lain and told of the stain at the corner of the table. This he could show the prosecutor, for it had not been scrubbed away—probably not even noticed.

After examining it, Pendleton scrutinized the floor. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "Isn't this—"

Brent saw what the prosecutor was looking at.

"Yes, it's blood," he agreed. "The officer had to shoot the dog."

"Who was sent from headquarters?"

"Collins, I think—"

"Oh, yes, I know him," said Pendleton. "Good man, Collins."

The prosecutor was silent for a time. Brent watched Peggy Archer without her being aware of it. She did look tired.

"Now, Miss Spalding," suggested Pendleton, smoothing his gloves.

The girl started nervously. "Oh, yes," she said, and crossed to the stove backed up by the glazed red bricks.

"This was where she kept the money," was her explanation as she lifted out the brick. Pendleton examined the recess from which the brick had been removed.

"Do you know how much was hidden there?"

"I can't really say," the girl replied, "three thousand dollars, perhaps more. I sent money to her regularly, and she had a small income."

"Has any one but you touched this brick?" asked Pendleton, taking it from the girl and turning it gingerly in his gloved hands. She shook her head. Pendleton replaced the glossed brick, then turned.

"Doctor," he asked, "do you think it possible that Mrs. Spalding might have been killed by a blow from a weapon?"

Brent shook his head. "I'm sure she either died from heart trouble and cut her head in falling, or that the fall was responsible for her death. You can see she did strike the table."

Pendleton questioned the girl next. "Have you any reason to believe that any one might attempt such a thing?"

Peggy Archer's face was white, her lips quivering. "Only that—that—" She was silent, then exclaimed: "The money's gone, isn't it? And my mother was living here alone. And—"

Pendleton eyed the girl sharply.

"Come, Miss Spalding," he said crisply, "there's something you're keeping from us."

Brent could feel the color rising to his own cheeks.

"There's nothing—nothing!" Peggy protested desperately. "I shouldn't have—"

"You would never have come to me," went on the prosecutor, "unless you had very good reason to suspect some one—"

Watching the girl, Brent saw her draw herself up abruptly, her eyes wide, and staring wildly at something behind him.

Whirling, Brent found himself facing a window—that was all, a window with the glass backed up by the blackness of the night, dully reflecting the light in the room.

Brent turned back just in time to catch the girl as she fell.

Pendleton had dashed through the door.

Brent worked swiftly to bring the girl back to consciousness. He was just beginning to get results when Pendleton reentered the room.

"No one in sight," he reported.

Brent scarcely heard him. "We must get her away from here," he said.

"Yes, get her rested up," said Pendleton. "I'll want to talk to her."

"What do you suppose she saw at the window?" asked Brent.

Pendleton laughed. "Saw? Why, nothing! Don't forget that Peggy Archer is a very clever actress."

Brent did not reply, and Pendleton continued: "She was lying to us before. She *does* know something. Fainting this way was just a final touch to put us off the track."

A rap at the door was followed before Pendleton could say "Come in!" by the entrance of the woman from across the street.

"Did you know that a man was looking

in at the window?" she asked breathlessly—and she pointed to where the light wavered against the darkened glass.

## CHAPTER IV.

"THE LAW CAN MAKE HER TALK."

BRENT carried Peggy Archer in his arms to the automobile at the curb, and again from the car to the door of his own home.

"Mammy," he said, as the old colored woman opened the door, "here's some one I want you to take very good care of."

"Bless you, chile!" exclaimed mammy in a whisper, looking at the girl in Brent's arms. "Ain't she jes' the mos' beautiful thing. She mus' be from Virginia, she mus'."

"We'll ask her after a while," promised Brent, "but now we'll put her up-stairs in the front room, and you'll sit by her like you do with me when I'm 'sick.'

"Is she very sick, honey?" asked the old colored woman in a hushed voice.

Phil was on his way up-stairs. He laid Peggy Archer on the wide bed and stood looking down at her. The face was without color, the eyes closed, and the hair disordered—but to Philip Brent she was for all that the most wonderful woman in the world.

"Don't you fret about her, Mr. Phil," mammy assured him. "Jewel won't let no harm come to her."

"Put her to bed," said Brent, "and if she asks any questions say it's the doctor's orders."

"There, I won't let her fuss none at all."

From the house Brent went to police headquarters, to convey certain requests that Pendleton had asked him to transmit before he left Maple Street. Inspector Walden was in charge at night, and he agreed to make the assignments the prosecutor wanted, a man from each shift to be detailed to the Spalding cottage.

Walden said he thought it could also be arranged to put the finger-print expert from the detective-bureau at the prosecutor's service the next morning.

But in the matter of having Patrolman

Collins report to Pendleton at once, the inspector could do nothing. "He is on the day shift this month," Waldon explained, but called the desk-officer to make sure. The desk-officer said that Collins was on day duty.

As Brent was descending the stairs, however, he saw Collins, out of uniform, standing at the foot.

"Some one said you were looking for me, doctor," he offered. "I was playing cards in the recreation-room."

Brent briefly explained. There was no question of being off duty. Collins cheerfully agreed to go. The officer detailed at the inspector's order for duty at the house came up, and as Brent offered to drive him up to Maple Street the three started off together.

"About the identification of that fellow out at the railroad-yards," said Collins as the car was rolling along Crescent Avenue, "we've got a bo in the lock-up who might know him."

"We'll take him around to the morgue to-morrow," said Brent.

"I wired that Reading, Pennsylvania, address we found in the clothes," Collins went on to explain, "but I don't expect we'll learn much from that."

Brent dropped the policemen at the Maple Street house, but did not go in himself. He had discovered a sudden dislike for Pendleton. If it was based on the prosecutor's observations on the honesty of Peggy Archer, or Miss Spalding, Brent did not admit it. He drove home.

Phil let himself into the house, and went straight up-stairs. Mammy answered his quiet tap at the door of the front room. The old colored woman was so obviously pleased with herself that he knew everything was all right.

The girl was sitting up in bed.

Phil did not speak until the door had closed behind mammy. Then he drew up a chair beside the bed and sat down.

"You're not angry?" he asked.

"About being brought here?" The girl smiled. "It's just what I needed: some one to take hold of me and make me do what is best for me."

"I think mammy will see to that."

"Oh, she has already," she assured him, taking hold of the fold of a lavender kimono she was wearing and stretching it out until her arm was at full length.

"This is mammy's," explained the girl. "Her very best. She abused you fearfully for forgetting to bring my things. Then she got me this—and a nightgown."

The girl's easy, pleasant manner did not deceive the doctor. Her eyes were not so bright that he couldn't see the deep trouble in them. But until morning, at least, he did not want to talk of the affair that had brought them together.

"Since I know half of it," he suggested, "would you mind telling me the rest of your real name?"

"Elsie," she said, then asked quickly: "What's wrong?"

Brent had started in surprise. "Why—er—" he stammered. He would have liked to recall the question that had brought the startling reply, but with the girl's curiosity excited he thought it would be best to go through with it. "The only time when to-day that I was in your house was when an Elsie Spalding—"

"That was my sister-in-law."

"You have a brother—"

"Her name was Elsie, too," continued the girl, hastily.

Brent did not hear the rest of what she was saying. He recalled as clearly as if the paper were before his eyes that the death-certificate had read "Elsie Spalding, single, daughter of Mrs. Emily, *et cetera*." Now this girl had said that the Elsie Spalding who had died was her brother's wife, thereby not a daughter of old Mrs. Spalding at all.

Brent wondered if perhaps Pendleton hadn't been right about Peggy Archer. Then he instantly hated himself for thinking such a thing, and in the midst of it realized that the girl had stopped speaking.

He looked up to find her studying him curiously. It seemed as if there was just a shadow of disappointment in her eyes.

Then she said quietly: "I am very tired. Perhaps I can sleep."

As Brent was going down-stairs the bell rang. He himself opened the door to admit Pendleton and Collins.

"I came to have that talk with Miss Spalding," announced the prosecutor confidently.

Brent shook his head: "She's too tired."

"Come, doctor, I must talk to her," the prosecutor insisted. "You can be sure no idle whim brought me here at this hour."

The acting county physician could only offer to show him up-stairs.

"I'll wait here," said Collins.

"Cigars in the living-room," said Brent. "Help yourself."

Mammy answered the doctor's whispered summons. For all her bulkiness she opened the door softly and stepped out into the hall without noise. Without saying anything, the old colored woman advanced on Brent and Pendleton, compelling them to retreat to the head of the stairs.

"Now, yo'-all shoo yo'self down to the groun' flo'," she ordered them. "They ain't no one mo' goin' to speak wif that chile to-night."

"But this is the prosecutor," protested Brent.

"Ah doan kyah if he am George Washin'ton hisself," declared mammy. "He ain't goin' to talk wif Miss Peggy—"

The door of the front room opened, and Peggy Archer stood there.

"Mr. Pendleton has some questions to ask you," said Brent, in spite of mammy's menacing glance.

"Where is he?" asked the girl.

"Here, Miss Spalding." This from Pendleton.

"Mr. Pendleton," she said, "I'm afraid I've given you a great deal of useless trouble. I don't think any investigation will be necessary. I agree with Dr. Brent as to the cause of my mother's death, and as for the money missing I imagine that it is merely because my mother changed the place in which she kept it—please forgive me."

"But—" began the prosecutor, when mammy hissed: "Yo'-all git right on downstairs."

Peggy Archer had closed the door, and Pendleton, after considering a moment, took mammy's advice.

As he was leaving he said: "It's quite plain that she won't talk willingly, and

that's enough to indicate to me that there is more in this business than appears on the surface. But mark my words—we're going to get to the bottom of it. The law can make her talk."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SCAREHEAD.

TWENTY-FOUR hours later Pendleton's investigation had established these facts:

Mrs. Spalding was last seen at four thirty Thursday afternoon. She was in her garden.

There was a light in the kitchen of the cottage as late as eight thirty that night.

Between seven thirty and eight o'clock, the police blotter would show the exact time, the man who lived in the corner house—Sturgis by name—had seen two strangers loitering in the neighborhood. To quote Mr. Sturgis: "Just after I went to the window one man turned the corner into Maple Street. I saw him pass under the light. Then I telephoned. When I got back to the window I saw the other moving off along Crescent Avenue."

"That isn't what you said Sunday morning," objected Mrs. West, the wife of the traveling salesman, "I remember distinctly—"

By that time she had been called to order.

Sturgis repeated with dignity: "When I got back to the window I saw him walk off down Crescent Avenue."

Some time during Thursday night—time not known—Marvin Johnson, who lived next door, had heard a dog barking. John J. McCabe, who lived at No. 77 Maple Street, also had been wakened by the barking of a dog.

Mrs. Marvin Johnson at nine thirty o'clock Sunday morning had tried the doors and found them locked.

Policeman Collins, on special duty, had investigated, and found the premises locked as reported. He had broken in and discovered Mrs. Spalding lying on the floor, dead. A starving dog was watching the body, and Collins had to kill the animal

before he could approach. There was also in the room a cat that disappeared, and a parrot, almost dead in its cage. The room was in perfect order. Collins had called the acting county physician.

Dr. Brent had found that Mrs. Spalding's death was due either to natural causes or accident, having struck her head against a table in losing her balance or in dropping from a heart stroke.

Pendleton was careful to prevent any hint of his activities reaching the newspapers, which had very nearly forgotten the death of the little old lady in Maple Street after the first day's story. But if the results had been given out, the above would have been the sum of public knowledge.

Only Pendleton and Brent, so far as they were aware, knew Mrs. Spalding's daughter was Peggy Archer, the actress. She had asked them not to disclose the fact. To the neighbors the girl was known as a "wealthy daughter" who occasionally came to see Mrs. Spalding.

Pendleton and Brent knew also that at seven o'clock in the evening of the Sunday Mrs. Spalding's death was discovered, the daughter had reported that some money was missing and that she suspected foul play.

Later that night, at the cottage, the girl had evaded Prosecutor Pendleton's questions, and afterward, at Brent's home, had completely repudiated the suspicions she had at first confessed.

The incident of the man looking in at the window Pendleton put down to some neighbor's curiosity. Mrs. West had been broken-hearted when he refused to record her testimony on this point, objecting that it had "no bearing on the case." Try as she would, Mrs. West had been balked at every turn. She regarded it as very unfair.

The next day Mrs. Spalding was buried. Also the finger-print expert reported that if there were any other finger-prints besides those of Elsie Spalding on the glazed brick they were too old to show. But he intended to make a more searching test with a new process.

Meanwhile Philip Brent was puzzling over the double identity of Elsie Spalding.

Just to be sure he went back over the health department records, and found filed there the death-certificate he had made out years before for "Elsie Spalding." There was no notation of marriage, and the parents' names were put down as "Walter" and "Emily," which was correct. Still the Elsie Spalding who was Peggy Archer had said that the girl who died was her sister-in-law.

Brent could easily have found out all he wished to know about these confusing affairs by inquiry in the neighborhood. But such a strong distaste for Pendleton and Pendleton's ways had come over him that he could not make himself go around prying into the problem. Besides, questions would cause talk, talk would reach Pendleton—and in the end it would be the girl who suffered.

Peggy Archer, after that first night, had left Brent's house for the Inn at the edge of town. She had withdrawn for two weeks from the cast of "*The Distant Shore*."

Two days after Mrs. Spalding had been buried Peggy Archer called on Pendleton at the court-house.

"I want to apologize to you, Mr. Pendleton," she said.

Not until then had Pendleton really appreciated how beautiful she was. The girl was not wearing mourning, and that impressed him favorably, for, he reflected cynically, few women can resist the temptation to wear black.

"I'm afraid I've been rather boorish," replied Pendleton, offering to assume the blame.

"It has all been so trying," sighed the girl. "And I was so silly to go running to you with that wild alarm about the money being lost."

For just a moment Pendleton looked serious, but the doubt passed as she continued: "I'm sure we'll find it somewhere else in the house—perhaps may never find it."

Pendleton, watching her with half-closed eyes, heard little of what she was saying. She began to rise, and suddenly Pendleton realized she was about to go.

"You've been so very kind," she smiled.

"It has been very easy to be kind—to you," said the prosecutor, stepping toward

her. She did not draw away. He stood very close, looking into her eyes. They were rather baffling eyes at that moment.

But her voice was soft and assured as she said: "Some time, if you'd care to, I'd like you to take dinner with me."

"To-night?" asked Pendleton quietly.

A curious expression came into the girl's eyes. They laughed at Pendleton, they rebuked him, they taunted him, they—yes, he was sure of it—they invited him.

"Why not to-night?" he urged her. "We can take the car and go off into the country—cross the river, if you say so, and go out on Long Island."

"You want me to—very much?" asked the girl.

For answer he caught her hands. She slipped away quickly and went to the door.

"Will you?" he asked, following her.

The girl opened the door, and nodded.

"What time?" he whispered.

The girl hardly made a sound, but her lips said, "Five-thirty." And she was gone.

Brent was in the Inn parlor a little after five that afternoon. Peggy and he had dined together every evening. There was a step outside the door, and Brent looked up to see the girl entering. He was surprised to find that although they were to have taken dinner at the Inn she was dressed for motoring.

"Just come in?" he asked, although he had been told when he arrived that Miss Spalding was in her room.

"No; I'm just going out," she said, settling on the arm of a spacious easy chair. "I'm to have dinner with Mr. Pendleton."

It seemed to Brent that the earth gave a sudden lurch. He all but swayed from his feet, and it is doubtful just what he would have done had not the Inn clerk come to the door just then to tell Miss Spalding she was wanted on the telephone. By the time the girl returned Brent had himself pretty well under control.

She came in, loosening her coat. "I'm not going out with Mr. Pendleton, after all," she said; then asked: "Do you know what's in the evening papers?"

"Haven't read it yet," said Brent as

calmly as could be expected, and picked up the folded copy he had tossed to the table when he came in.

"He told me to look at to-night's paper," she said; then, glancing at Brent, cried: "What is it?"

"It" was a seven-column head across the top of the *Press*:

#### MRS. SPALDING MURDER VICTIM

The *Press*, an anti-administration paper, delivered in that night's issue a broadside that it had been quietly preparing for three days. The death of Mrs. Spalding, colorful in the faithfulness of the dog, but forgotten in the next day's news, had suddenly been electrified into a tremendous mystery and scandal.

In the first place, the parrot that had been cared for by the next-door neighbors had, when sufficiently recovered and able to talk, shrieked: "Police! Robbers! Help!"

The *Press* had affidavits of the Johnsons and the other neighbors to prove that this was so, and that the parrot had never been known to raise those cries before.

Secondly: The local paper had discovered (and it may have been through Mrs. West, who was present when Brent recognized the girl) that the daughter who had arrived the day the death was discovered was none other than Peggy Archer, an actress then playing in New York.

Thirdly: Simeon Sturgis, of Crescent Avenue and Maple Street, declared that the police had been derelict in not running down the clue afforded by his report of two evil-looking characters who had loitered in the neighborhood.

Fourthly: Mrs. Fanny West charged Prosecutor Pendleton (the opposition party's prosecutor) with having denied her the right to testify at the inquest.

Fifthly: The *Press* had learned that Miss Spalding (Peggy Archer) had made representations to Prosecutor Pendleton that money was missing from her mother's home, and that she feared foul play.

Sixthly: Miss Spalding (Peggy Archer) was known to have spent Sunday night at the home of Dr. Philip Brent, temporarily county physician by the grace of the op-

posing political party, and to have been frequently in his company since.

Lastly (and this showed signs of having been rushed into the edition) the *Press* was prepared at the proper time to prove that Miss Spalding (Peggy Archer) had made a dinner engagement for that night with Prosecutor Pendleton.

Summing up, the *Press* declared that not only had the authorities been negligent, but went on to allege that there was a conspiracy to suppress the true facts of Mrs. Spalding's death.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A TWENTY-DOLLAR BILL.

**S**HUFFLIN' JOE" MADDEN was in again—for vagrancy, as usual. As a rule, Madden found one jail as good as another, and generally better, so far as sleeping was concerned, than "flopping" in a hallway, box car, wood-shed, or open lot. But this particular time Shufflin' Joe regarded being jailed as a bitter fate, for in the ragged lining of his dirt-glazed coat was a twenty-dollar bill.

The iron of remorse turned in Shufflin' Joe's soul when he thought that if he had only spent two bits of that double tenner for a bed in a lodging-house he might still be enjoying liberty and the remaining \$19.75.

That was something for him to think about as he chewed on the plug tobacco that he always kept hidden against the ever-present possibility of being put where there was a strict no-smoking rule.

Madden had come to town with Bob Genroe, a former traveling acquaintance he had met on the deck of an east-bound freight. Genroe said he had worked the town before, and he proved a good guide. They passed up the fashionable quarter and struck into the section of more modest homes.

Foraging around for dinner was eminently successful. When they met later Genroe had landed two handouts and a half-dollar, while Madden, following the other's directions, had been asked in for a "sit-down."

They had previously picked out an empty, tumbledown stable as a place to sleep, and, as a general thing, that would have been next on the program. But Genroe said he wanted to look up one or two people he used to know, and told Madden to go ahead to the stable and he'd be there later.

Genroe woke Madden up when he got back to the stable. Madden smiled when he remembered how excited the other had been—and good reason why.

"Some luck I had, Shufflin'!" Genroe had whispered. "Picked up a hundred dollars. This twenty is for you. I won't ask you for none of it unless I get cleaned. I'm going back down-town. S'-long."

That was the last Shufflin' Joe had seen of Genroe.

For a few minutes Madden considered edging in at the lodging-house they had passed, but at length he decided that the barn was plenty good enough, hid the twenty-dollar bill in his coat, and went back to sleep.

When Madden woke it was to find himself in an unfamiliar part of town, standing on the sidewalk, with a policeman holding a generous handful of his collar. It wasn't the first time Shufflin' Joe had walked in his sleep, but it was the first time he had ever somnambulated into any such trouble as this.

But he was too well tutored in the uses and effect of the locust wood night-stick to fall into the error of offering the policeman any such excuse as sleep-walking.

The policeman lost no time in having Mr. Madden transferred to the local lock-up, and the next morning the judge had made the usual remark about thirty days.

The only substitute for a silver lining that Shufflin' Joe Madden could see was the tattered lining of his own coat. For hidden among the rags of that garment his twenty-dollar bill had been smuggled, along with his chewing-tobacco, past the police frisking. And even if he was for the moment denied the luxuries the gold-back would allow him, he still had the money and ample leisure to devise ways and means of enjoying it.

Madden knew nothing of the death of

Mrs. Spalding until the *Press* bombshell burst among the political heretics at headquarters whom the *Press* accused along with the county authorities. Its full effect was not felt till the following day. The morning paper, taking up the cudgels to reply to the *Press* in behalf of the administration, had explained some things. But it couldn't explain away the parrot and the missing money.

The minute Shufflin' Joe heard of the murder and missing money, he remembered Genroe and the twenty-dollar bill. From what Madden knew of Genroe he was pretty much of a yegg. Shufflin' Joe himself was not of that hard-boiled gentry, but he knew their ways and their ear-marks.

Madden figured back, and estimated that the old lady had died the night Genroe and he came to town. His speculation was interrupted by the approach of Luke Peddy, the police-station janitor—a little, near-sighted man. Shufflin' Joe resumed his listless mopping of the floor. But old Luke was bent on conversation.

"Did y' ever hear tell of such a thing?" demanded Peddy, "gettin' up a big hullabaloo about a murder because a parrot starts hollering for the police!"

Shufflin' Joe leaned on his mop-handle. "Some of them parrots has surprisin' sense," he said. "I knew a sailor wunst that had one that could sing like a woman and swear so a man would blush to hear."

"But the i-dee of a parrot picking up 'Police! Help! Robbers!' right off," protested the outraged Peddy.

"Had to learn some time," observed Madden, "and the likely time would be when the old lady was using that language."

"One thing about it, though," admitted the janitor, "the money appears to be missing. I wonder what about this daughter that's on the stage?"

Shufflin' Joe chuckled. "I heard some one sayin' that the young doctor fellow came out in this mornin's paper and showed that while the girl was at his house it was only because there were no accommodations anywhere else, and that he spent that night at the club."

"Oh, so far as young Brent's all right," Peddy declared. "The people to the Inn say they didn't have no room when he stopped there, and he was at the club sure enough. But it's Pendleton I'm wonderin' about. I don't suppose I should say anything, but you never can tell—" The janitor turned away with an eloquent gesture.

Madden kept his ears open, but he learned little. Most of the talk consisted of opinions and speculations on the facts already ascertained. Apparently old Peddy knew as much about it as the rest.

Shufflin' Joe suspected that he himself knew more than any of them. For one thing, he guessed he knew where Genroe had gotten the money.

## CHAPTER VII.

### FINGER-PRINTS.

THE effect of the charges in the *Press* was just what might have been expected. Prosecutor and police went feverishly to work on the case. As for Peggy Archer, the notoriety made it impossible for her to stay at the Inn. She had packed to return to New York, but on the advice of Philip Brent had adopted another course.

He had persuaded the girl that it would be unwise under the circumstances to leave town, and the arrival of Nancy Brent and her husband, Stoddard Blake, had settled any doubt Peggy may have had.

Brent had telephoned for his sister and brother-in-law to come out from New York, and with the conventions thus guarded, Peggy Archer returned to the privacy of the old-fashioned house downtown. It had gladdened Brent's heart to make the answer he had made in the morning paper to the scandal-mongering people of the provincial town. And this defiance was an additional delight.

The thing that most disturbed Brent was the fact that he could not reply to the charge that Peggy had made a dinner engagement with Pendleton.

"Isn't there some explanation?" he asked the girl.

"Why should I explain?" she demanded. "Is there anything so fearfully wicked in agreeing to take dinner with a man?"

"But under the circumstances?"

"I can't see what difference that makes."

"You must remember, Miss Archer," he urged, "that all cities aren't as sophisticated as New York. Besides, there surely was a reason why—"

"Of course there was a reason," she replied. "I think Thornton Pendleton is a very interesting man."

The girl's use of the prosecutor's given name made Brent tremble. He was still "Doctor" or "Dr. Brent."

Philip Brent did not continue the conversation.

That morning Collins and he were to take the tramp from the lockup to identify the body in the morgue—that of the man who had fallen under the train. The visit had been postponed for one reason or another.

Driving to police headquarters, Brent saw Pendleton leaving the *Press* office. He wanted to talk to Pendleton, and hailed him as he pulled into the curb.

"I've just been following your example, doctor," explained the prosecutor as he climbed into the car.

"In what?"

"In regard to Miss Archer," laughed Pendleton. "I think the *Press* will print an apology to me to-night."

They were nearing police headquarters. "Can I take you on to the court-house?" Brent asked.

"Wish you would," said Pendleton; then went on explaining: "They must have been out of their heads to have printed a thing like that."

"You mean your making the engagement with Miss Archer?"

"Precisely," said Pendleton, smiling. "You'll remember I said the law would make her talk if I couldn't. There's no comparison between compulsion under the law and a friendly little chat when it comes to getting a woman to tell what she knows—and what you want to know."

The prosecutor was not aware of the glance Brent gave him.

"And she played right into my hands," Pendleton went on. "In fact, she first proposed our having dinner together. I saw through it in a minute."

The prosecutor omitted mention of the fact that after a momentary flash of perspicacity he had deliberately deceived himself into believing that Peggy Archer had come to him quite innocently.

"It's just as I said, doctor," continued Pendleton. "There is something she has been trying to hide. She wasn't going to let me go on with the investigation if she could help it."

"How about the parrot?" asked Brent, abruptly changing the subject.

Pendleton's satisfied smile faded. "I don't know," he admitted. "The reports about the parrots are true. None of the neighbors ever heard it talk that way before. Certainly what it says is significant. But we can't make a case out of that."

"The money furnished a motive."

"But there is not the slightest trace of method. You yourself say the old woman's death wasn't due to violence."

"If something else turns up," asked Brent coolly, "I wonder if it will be as easy to explain as the insinuations about Miss Archer?"

The prosecutor laughed.

"Don't worry, doctor. If an explanation is needed, we'll have one."

In front of the court-house Pendleton's assistant was waiting for him.

"You're wanted at police headquarters right away," the assistant explained.

"Would you mind, doctor?"

"I was going there myself. There is a man in the lockup we want to try on the identification of a tramp killed by a train."

"I'm interested in a man they've got there, too," remarked Pendleton, and went on to explain: "some sort of disreputable customer they picked up the night Mrs. Spalding died."

"Oh, in connection with what this man Sturgis says about the two men at Crescent Avenue and Maple Street?"

"Yes. But I don't look for much to come of it. This fellow was picked up 'way at the other end of town. However, if the papers insist—"

Pendleton became silent, and Brent did not reopen the conversation. He was in no mood for talking to the man. Headquarters was reached quickly.

The prosecutor and Brent entered together, but the latter turned aside at the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, doctor," the desk man called to him, "I was trying to get you on the phone, too. You're wanted up in the detective bureau."

Brent nodded. Something was surely stirring when Pendleton and he were in such urgent demand. The prosecutor had entered the office of the chief of the detective bureau before Brent started upstairs.

When the doctor opened the door he found Bradley, the head of the bureau, the finger-print man, and Collins were there besides the prosecutor. They were silent as Brent closed the door behind him; then Pendleton said:

"Doctor, we've found the finger-prints of a man on that loose brick. They're too old to use for identification, but we found the same kind of marks on the table around the corner where you showed me the blood-stain and the gray hairs."

Pendleton paused. Then he announced:

"That makes it look as if it *was* a murder."

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### THE THIRD DEGREE.

**I**N the middle of the forenoon Policeman Collins came down-stairs and went over to where Madden was wielding his mop. "Put that junk away," said the officer, "and come with me."

Madden leaned the mop against the wall, got rid of his chew, and shuffled after the policeman, who had started back toward the stairs. Madden wondered what it was all about. Collins started up-stairs. That meant something new.

In all the times Shufflin' Joe had heretofore been in police stations, those superior powers up-stairs had never deemed him worthy of attention. Madden was too obviously just a shiftless, good-natured son

of rest to be of interest to such busy gentlemen as department sleuths. He was climbing the stairs. It was a novel experience. Then it suddenly occurred to him that all this had something to do with Genroe.

Shufflin' Joe found himself in a room with the two men he had seen ascend the stairs a few minutes before, a man in shirt-sleeves with an identifying gold badge fastened to his suspenders and visible through the armhole of his vest. This was Bradley. Simms, the finger-print man, had left. The others were seated.

"Put out a chair for him, Collins," instructed the captain of detectives. The policeman placed a chair so that whoever sat in it would be close to the captain and facing him. Behind the captain sat Pendleton and Brent.

As the captain gestured Madden to sit down, Collins went over and stood by the door.

"Where's the yegg you came to town with?" demanded the captain.

"Don't know," mumbled Shufflin' Joe, shrugging his shoulders.

The captain's random shot had struck home. It wasn't until Madden had answered that it occurred to him to wonder how the captain knew he had been traveling with any one.

"Don't lie to me."

"I ain't lyin'," replied Madden.

"What did you do when you hit town?"

Madden writhed uncomfortably. He was realizing how lucky he had been never to have gone "up-stairs" before. He was afraid he would say something that would look bad for Genroe.

"Come on. Talk!" commanded the captain. "What did you do?"

"Bummed the eats."

"Then you didn't stick together," remarked the captain, knowing the panhandler's way.

"No." Madden knew what he would do. He would say he hadn't seen Genroe after that.

"What luck did you have?"

"Got a sit-down."

"How about your partner?"

"Shufflin' Joe almost answered "Hand-

outs" before he saw the trap. "Don't know," he said. "I didn't see him after we split."

"When did you get the feed?"

"Don't know."

"Was it six o'clock?"

"Don't know."

"You've got to know," said the captain, leaning toward him. "Was it six?"

"Later than that."

"Was it seven?"

"I ain't got no wrist-watch, cap."

"Was it seven?" the captain roared.

"Before seven," muttered Madden.

"Between six and seven, then, you ate."

Madden nodded awkwardly.

"And you didn't see your partner after you started looking for a handout?"

"That's right," said Shufflin' Joe.

As Madden spoke the captain half raised out of his chair and snapped: "But a man looking out of his window saw the two of you together at ten minutes of eight."

Madden shrank from his accuser. He had noticed the man watching them, and had suggested to Genroe that they had better be getting on. But the captain got no result, although he was right in his guess that Madden was one of the men Sturgis had seen.

Shufflin' Joe declared: "No one seen us together at ten minutes of eight, because we'd cut away from each other nearly two hours before that."

The captain scowled at Madden, then turned to Collins. "Who brought this fellow in?" he asked.

"Brady did," replied Collins. "The inspector sent out for him some time ago, and he ought to be here any minute."

The captain turned back to Madden and studied him.

"How did you get the tobacco?" he asked.

"What tobacco?"

"The tobacco you were chewing," said the captain. "Where did you get it?"

Shufflin' Joe knew that at all hazards he must keep them from finding out that he had sneaked anything through the search. Otherwise he stood a strong chance to lose his twenty dollars.

"Say, captain," he said, "if you're trying to hook my partner up on that murder charge, I don't know nothin' about it."

The attempted evasion failed.

"Come on, now," roared the captain. "Where'd you get that tobacco?"

"The janitor gave it to me," Shufflin' Joe said desperately.

"The janitor doesn't chew," retorted the captain. Madden blinked. He started nervously when the captain declared: "You sneaked it in!"

"What did they find on him, Collins?" asked the captain.

"Usual junk," answered Collins, referring to the memorandum he had made from the police blotter.

"Well, he got in with the tobacco," said the captain. "Maybe he slipped something else by. Better give him another going over—"

There was a knock at the door.

"Later," finished the captain, as Collins, opening the door a few inches, turned to say over his shoulder: "It's Brady."

"Good!" said the captain, and called: "Come in, Brady."

The officer entered.

The captain motioned him to be seated and turned back to Madden.

"Now, when you and your partner flopped for the night—" he began.

"I told you I didn't see him after we split to look for the eats," Madden reminded him.

"Well, where did you sleep?"

"In a stable."

"Where was it?"

"Don't know."

"Far from where you ate?"

"Not very."

"Where did you eat?"

"In a brown house."

"What street?"

Shufflin' Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you mean to say you don't know what street it was on?"

"I never was in this town before."

"You got a 'sit-down,' didn't you?"

Madden nodded.

"Was there ever a bum who didn't take care to remember the location of any place he ever got grub? What street was it?"

"I don't know," protested Madden.

"Don't lie!" said the captain fiercely. Madden recoiled. He thought for a minute the man was going to take him by the throat.

"Where was it?" insisted the captain.

"Elm Street," muttered Madden.

"And you slept in a stable not very far away."

"I don't know how far it was."

"When I asked you before you said 'Not far.'"

"There's an old stable in Willow Street," put in Collins, "that's four blocks over from Elm."

"Was it four blocks?" asked the captain.

"I guess so," whispered Shufflin' Joe.

"You went to sleep in a stable in Willow Street," said the captain with disarming quietness.

Madden nodded.

Then the captain burst out: "But you were arrested at Mill and Waverly at the other end of town, a mile and a half away. How did you get there?"

Shufflin' Joe felt a kind of dizziness come over him.

"How did you get there?" demanded the captain.

"I—I walked in my sleep," faltered Madden.

The captain of detectives stared at him in amazement. "Walked in your sleep!" he echoed, then burst into a guffaw of laughter.

Pendleton, Collins, and Brady joined him. Brent did not feel like laughing. The big, frowsy tramp was pathetic in his helplessness.

"Brady," demanded the captain, "did this yegg tell you he was walking in his sleep?"

"He did not, sir."

The captain's eyes narrowed. His lips moved as if he were about to ask Shufflin' Joe another question, but he did not speak. A moment later he turned to Collins and said: "Better go through his clothes, now."

Madden could hardly keep himself steady. He could guess the frisking that is given a bum about to be locked up for

vagrancy and the search by men like these would be very different bits of business. And he was right. Brady and Collins began by poking through his pockets, then prying into the rips and tears. Brady was on the side where the bill was concealed.

Now, Collins discovered the chewing tobacco. He took it out and put it back. Brady was close to the hidden bank-note. He almost touched it, but passed on. Shufflin' Joe breathed easier. He was safe, now. But no.

Collins began to check up on Brady's search. His hands worked quickly to where the money was concealed. It seemed he must have touched it. Then he, too, passed on. Shufflin' Joe could have laughed and cried with happiness. He had time, now, to see that the captain was talking to the two men seated behind him.

Collins scribbled something on a piece of paper and laid it at the captain's elbow. Probably didn't want to interrupt him, reflected Shufflin' Joe. He noticed how bright the sunshine was.

The captain swung around.

"Nothing," said Collins, who was standing back of the prisoner and able without being seen to make a gesture to call the captain's attention to the slip of paper on his desk.

The captain apparently paid no attention.

"You're sure you were walking in your sleep?" he asked Madden, and Shufflin' Joe, seeing that the other was unable to keep back a smile at the idea, grinned as he answered: "Sure as any one can be when they're asleep."

"Then when did the other bum pass you the bill?" The captain's manner had changed like a flash.

Shufflin' Joe's jaw dropped. He realized dimly that Collins had ripped the bill from the lining of his coat, but he was too staggered to do anything but stare at the captain.

"When did he give it to you?" roared the captain.

"He—he—he didn't!" stammered Madden, his face dead white. "I—I found it!"

"Look here, you," snarled the captain,

"don't make the mistake of lying. We've lined up your partner for that murder in Maple Street, and if you don't come clean we'll get you, too."

"I'm tellin' the truth, cap'n!" Madden insisted feverishly. "I didn't see him after we split to bum the eats—and I found the twenty—I found it, cap'n!"

The captain had risen. "Bring him along, Collins," he said. "Ready, Mr. Prosecutor, doctor?"

It was all pretty much of a blur to Madden as he was marched out of police headquarters, along the street, and into an undertaker's establishment. But things came into focus again when Captain Bradley said:

"Madden, a man was killed in the railroad yards early Friday morning. We think it was your partner. You're going to have a chance to identify the body."

The captain half led, half pushed Madden into the rear room of the undertaker's establishment, with Collins at the other arm. Pendleton and Brent followed.

Shufflin' Joe looked at the dead man. He saw at the first glance that it wasn't Bob Genroe. Maybe the cops had enough evidence to put the murder on Genroe, but since they thought this might be him it was a cinch they hadn't picked him up. Genroe had given him twenty dollars—the twenty was gone, now, but Shufflin' Joe was grateful. And here was his chance to make good, and help Genroe to a clean getaway.

"Is it your partner?" asked the captain.

Shufflin' Joe nodded. They couldn't do anything to *him*.

"Sure of it?"

"Yes," said Madden, trying clumsily to make it seem that he was sorry to see what had happened to a friend.

"You couldn't be mistaken?"

"It's him, all right."

The captain turned to Collins. "Where's your man?" he asked.

The policeman crossed to a rear door. When he opened it a man stepped out of the closet. The captain nudged the prosecutor as he asked: "You're the brakeman?"

The man nodded uneasily.

"And you can positively identify this body as that of the bum you kicked off your train seven o'clock Thursday night at Stroudsburg, sixty miles away?"

"Yes," gulped the railroader.

The captain turned on Shufflin' Joe.

"Now, Madden," he said, "I charge you with the murder of Mrs. Emily Spalding."

For a moment Madden looked stupidly at his accuser. Then he threw his arms up in front of his face and cried hoarsely: "Oh, my God!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### FOOTPRINTS.

BRENT was glad to get into the sun-shine again. He had felt stifled standing in that small back room while the tramp had trapped himself. The shabby trickery of which the man had been made a victim left a bad taste in Brent's mouth.

Captain Bradley and Pendleton followed him to the sidewalk, supporting Madden between them. The man seemed to have no strength in his knees. His head was hanging, and rolled from side to side.

Brent turned away, to see Collins emerging from the morgue with the brakeman. He wondered whether this man was really a railroader or a detective used by Bradley in preparing the pitfall for Madden. Had the arrest merely been on the strength of Madden's reaction when the lie was given his identification? The reaction had been violent enough.

Collins's companion started off in the opposite direction, Brent fell in step with the policeman, and as they started for headquarters, asked: "Was that brakeman genuine?"

"Genuine?" asked Collins, puzzled, then laughed. "Oh, you thought it might have been a plant. No. He was the goods. I didn't get a chance to tell you, but he came into headquarters this morning, and when I took him to the morgue, positively identified the body as that of a bo he had kicked off the train at Stroudsburg last Thursday night. It worked like a charm, didn't it?"

Brent couldn't share the policeman's enthusiasm. "The captain said the tramp had been killed Friday morning," objected the doctor. "It was some time Saturday night or Sunday morning, you know."

"Yes," agreed Collins, as they stopped in front of headquarters. "But there are tricks in all trades. The main thing is that he couldn't possibly have been in town at that time Thursday night—which means that Madden was lying. Coming inside?"

Brent shook his head. He came perilously near uttering the hope that he never would have to cross that threshold again. The doctor managed to answer Collins's cheery good-by, then climbed into his car.

Brent found Peggy and his sister on the sun porch at the rear of the house where there was a wide lawn and four old cherry-trees.

"Nan, would you mind?" he suggested.

Both women had been quick to read the concern in his face. His sister patted his arm as she passed him to enter the house through the French windows. Peggy waited for him to speak.

"It's about that dinner engagement," said Brent.

The girl looked puzzled.

"Pendleton has given the *Press* what he calls an 'explanation' of it."

A question came into the blue eyes.

"He says," continued Brent, "that it was evident to him that you had come with the idea of getting him to promise that he would drop the case. And that he played up to you for the purpose of finding out what you knew about it. I believe the explanation says that 'a woman will talk more freely in a friendly chat than when compelled by law.'"

Peggy closed her eyes. Again she seemed to Brent to be very tired.

But it was with surprising assurance that she said: "If Mr. Pendleton says that he had any other purpose than dining with me, he doesn't tell the truth."

"Why do you say that?" Brent asked quickly. "He claims he was just leading you on."

The girl shook her head. "No matter what he says, his only idea was to have dinner with me. I've known a great many

men, Dr. Brent. Pendleton wasn't doing the leading."

"Then you *did* go there to get him to make some kind of an agreement?"

Peggy rose abruptly.

"I did not. What was there to come to an agreement about? My only reason in going was to thank him for his kindness."

"He says you suggested the dinner."

"It's possible."

"But why?"

"I told you this morning."

"I don't believe you!"

"Really!" The girl's eyes flashed.

Brent found himself becoming fearfully confused. Peggy had started to enter the house.

"I think, Thornton Pendle—"

"Oh, don't say it again!" begged Brent. He was utterly miserable.

The girl stopped and faced him. Brent avoided her eyes.

He was thinking that whether it was the truth or not a man was a good deal of a cad to offer any such explanation as Pendleton had.

Brent felt the girl's hands on his shoulders. He resisted, but after a moment looked up at her.

"I know what you're thinking," said the girl quietly, "but I don't know that I blame Mr. Pendleton. After all, he must look to his own interests. And the day of a woman having any special claim to consideration has passed."

There was a hint of nervousness in the girl's voice. She paused for a moment, then proceeded as surely as before: "If Mr. Pendleton imagines that I called for any other reason than courtesy he is mistaken. While I was there no such idea occurred to him. Perhaps it came as an afterthought. But you must admit, Phil, that it's rather a good excuse."

Brent heard only one word: "Phil." He tried to catch her hands, but she had already drawn them away. Her eyes were closed so that the dark lashes quivered against the white cheeks.

"Rather a good excuse!" As the whisper wavered into a laugh that was slightly hysterical she swayed toward the doors and passed into the house.

Just as Brent was about to follow, he heard behind him a call of "Mr. Phil."

Brent turned to see mammy standing outside the screening of the porch, beckoning to him. He went over and opened the door that led to the lawn. The old colored woman entered with a furtive glance behind her.

"Ah've been watchin' to catch you alone."

"What's the trouble, mammy?"

Jewel assured herself no one was near, then took hold of Brent and drew him down until his ear was close to her mouth. "It's about Miss Peggy," she whispered.

Brent caught his breath. His glance questioned the old colored woman.

Mammy rolled her eyes to right and left, then went on whispering: "There was a man in her room last night."

This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, \* the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

"What are you talking about, mammy?" he demanded sharply.

"Fo' the Lawd, Mr. Phil, mammy found smoked-up cigarettes up yeah this mo'ning when she went to wake Miss Peggy."

Brent straightened up and smiled down at the old colored woman.

"Do you know, mammy," he said, "it wouldn't surprise me if Miss Peggy had smoked those cigarettes herself."

Mammy's eyes opened in astonishment, then she said determinedly: "But Miss Peggy don't go to muddyin' up the carpet with foot-tracks that make yo' old' mammy's look like hummin' birds."

"What do you mean, mammy?"

"Just what I says, Mr. Phil. Last night they was a man in Miss Peggy's room that left his cigarettes on the table and his foot-tracks on the flo'."



# The Little Blue Box

by William Merriam Rouse

RHODA BARKER was cleaning the pantry when she found the arsenic. She shook the small, blue pasteboard box, slid it open, and stared at the white powder for several seconds before she remembered what it was. Her husband, Herman Barker, had bought it for rats, and had put it away on the top shelf in the pantry with a warning, a long time before his death. She recalled his emphasis because the box was not marked. A careful old fool, she thought; and she hated his

memory almost as much for his fussiness as she did for his having let her believe that he was rich up to the hour of his death.

She sat down upon a stool to rest, pushing loosened black hair from a damp forehead. Then her hands went up in a sudden little panic. It would never do to let Martin Hewes come in and see her flushed and draggled. She whipped a piece of broken mirror from a drawer, and with strong, white fingers made her hair neat and her face dry of perspiration. Now the

flush died to a becoming color; her black eyes lost their slight look of strain. She knew that she was a handsome woman—at well, something over thirty; ten times handsomer than that little minx, her step-daughter, whom she could hear moving about the kitchen.

The hussy! Rhoda did not intend that she should be alone with Martin for five minutes—not for a minute if it could be helped. She had been watching as she worked, with frequent glances through the pantry window, and now she saw him come out of the horse-barn with his coat slung over one widely jutting shoulder. She knew he was going to the village that afternoon. He certainly would come in to wash up first. She leaped to her feet—lithe, strong, dynamic. She was conscious that she slipped the blue box of arsenic into her apron pocket, but at the moment she did not know why she did it. At any rate, she did not admit to herself that she intended to make any use of it.

Amy Barker, scouring pans, looked up and smiled as Rhoda entered the kitchen. She was neither beautiful, handsome, nor pretty. Her blue eyes were just blue eyes, and her hair could not be called anything more than light-colored. At a glance she was not a rival whom Rhoda Barker need even think of. Not at the first glance. The second and third and fourth glances were the ones that the older woman feared. She knew how the little devil smiled and smiled and talked with the voice of singing waters until people lost their heads about her.

"What in the world are you scouring pans for?" demanded Mrs. Barker.

"Oh, they look brighter." Amy actually seemed happy at the thought of bright pans; and Rhoda could have drawn her nails with zest down that cheerful face. But the step of Martin Hewes was at the door, and she drew her own smile forth and let it curve richly over her faultless teeth.

He filled the doorway, up and down and from side to side, as he entered. There was something of the quality of the mountains in his appearance; in the steadiness of his eyes, the deliberation of his ordinary movements, and the air of unshakable

strength that his presence carried with it. He looked at Rhoda; then his eyes traveled to Amy. From her they went—to the kitchen sink with its wash-basin and towel.

That was the aggravating, the desire-provoking quality of the man. Rhoda Barker had hired him a month before. At the end of a week she had wanted him to marry her; and at the end of four weeks of careful effort to draw him she could be sure only that he was interested in her. Also, at times, he seemed to be interested in Amy.

"I'll be back for supper," he said, before he plunged face and hands into the water. "Any errands?"

"Yes, Martin." Rhoda walked over to him and slipped a folded paper into the pocket of his skirt. She was too clever to make it a caress; too clever to let her fingers tremble as they touched his bulging chest. "There's a list."

He gazed down at her, and into his eyes came a gleam such as she had been able to rouse once or twice before by the nearness of her rounded body.

"You look like spring," he said frankly.

She laughed with delight. It was the first time that he had addressed a direct compliment to her; and the blue box might have been forgotten if he had not looked beyond her toward Amy, who was giving her whole attention to the pans.

"Anything you want, Miss Barker?"

"Not a thing," she smiled. "Thank you."

Rhoda would have given ten dollars, scarce as ready money was with her, to know just why his attention had suddenly gone from her to the girl. How she hated Amy's smile! If only she would overdo it! But she did not. It was more of a momentary light than a real, tooth-showing smile; and Amy never used it except when there was cause.

Hewes wiped his face, put on his coat and hat, and went out. Rhoda Barker knew she would not have felt so much like a pent-up volcano if he had been a man who talked more; then she would have been able to judge how he felt, no matter what he said. But he indulged in no useless words, and this in itself was one of his

charms for her. Suddenly her rage blazed toward Amy.

"You're always around when he comes in!" Her voice rose, trembling a little.

Amy looked at her soberly. That was the worst of the hussy—or one of the many worst things. She did not melt and weep. Rhoda Barker had made soft women go limp as dish-rags under her wrath, but Amy was not soft.

"I don't try to be," replied the girl.

It was that sober steadiness, as yet free from anger, that drove Rhoda to a complete loss of self-control. For long, uncertain months she had kept herself bottled up.

"You lie! You little snake!"

The hands of Amy Barker jerked as she straightened up from her work and faced her stepmother. She was now thoroughly angry, but her anger showed itself mainly in a lifting of the head, an air of aloofness that fired Rhoda more than a screamed insult.

"You haven't any right to talk to me like that. I've never done a thing to get Martin Hewes. I know you want him."

"Who told you I wanted him?" demanded Mrs. Barker, and then her voice went into a sneer. "Scouring pans! That's a pretty thing excuse to be in the kitchen this afternoon, when you knew he'd come in to wash up."

"It's work you won't do."

"You're damned right I won't do it!" Rhoda dropped back ten years, to the life from which Herman Barker had married her. "I worked eight or nine years for your father, and what did he leave me when he died? Nothing but this farm that I can't sell, with you tied to it, and a good crop of whiskers. If I'd known the old bird didn't have a stocking full of money I'd never left the city. I was a fool, all right!"

"My father was the fool!" Amy began to put the pans away quietly enough, but Rhoda knew that she had struck home. "And you got what you deserved. Marry Martin Hewes if you can fool him. I won't stand in your way."

There was a sting in that, but Mrs. Barker managed to make herself rest on her victory. She knew she had pierced the reserve of the girl, and the knowledge

comforted her for the moment. She drove herself out of the house with a force that left the door reverberating behind her—into the spring sunshine and out behind the hay barn, where her trembling legs let her down upon a flat rock.

Something had to be done. Herman Barker had left her his farm, in trust, with the stipulation that she must provide for Amy. The girl didn't know how to do anything in particular, and she had to stay until she got married. Even Rhoda, with confidence in her wits and good looks and a considerable experience with the world, had to stay. In a year and a half of widowhood—deadly dull, respectable widowhood—she had not been able to get money enough ahead to break loose and try her luck in the city. Then, following a lout who knew barely enough to do the work, came Martin Hewes. Here was opportunity—a man who was a farmhand only on his way up to prosperity. But whatever he was Rhoda Barker loved him.

She suspected that Amy loved him, too. Underneath her smile and her quietness the girl was a rock. Martin Hewes was a rock. Rhoda Barker knew that she could break herself beating against either one of them. But there were other ways to deal with rocks. She could handle Martin—if she had him alone. Amy was the obstacle. She must be chipped—melted—worn—

The clenched hands of the woman struck down upon her lap in a gesture of impotence. One of them hit against the box in her apron pocket. She took it out, having forgotten for a moment what she had put there.

Poison! There had been a time, at the end of her first year of disappointed widowhood, when she had thought of killing herself. But she was too much alive for that. Now, for the first time, she connected the arsenic definitely in her mind with Amy. Death! That would take the little devil out of the road once and for all!

She put this thought away with genuine horror. Murder was a terrible thing. It wasn't safe, and she wouldn't think of it, anyway. She wished Amy were dead, and she could think with pleasure of her as

suffering. But murder! Rhoda turned the box over, slid it open, looked at the white powder for the second time that afternoon. This time she speculated about it. A little was good for the complexion, a little more made you sick, and a good dose—she knew what had happened to the rats.

Sick! Suddenly the thought of sickness gave her something in the nature of inspiration. If Amy were sick maybe she'd lose some of that don't-touch-me air. Martin Hewes was not the man to see anything in an ailing woman—a dull-eyed woman who dragged her feet. No woman with pain in her vitals could smile the way that little devil did. And the contrast between her and Rhoda would be even more marked than it was now. It would take some of the starch out of her for a little while—long enough. But would it be safe to try it—just a tiny pinch?

When Rhoda Barker got up to go into the house she had not made any decision. The shadows were long across the kitchen floor, and Amy was setting the table for supper. This fanned up the hatred of Rhoda. Amy never forgot anything. Always on time, always pleasant, always well! The two women did not speak as they worked together in preparing the meal.

The sound of the turning door-knob sent a thrill through Rhoda; fifteen minutes before she had heard the buggy-wheels and had known that Hewes was home again. He came in with his arms full of packages. In silence he carried them into the pantry; but he came out with one small package still in his hands, and as he began to unwrap it both the women watched him. He held a box in each hand, the same in size and shape, and even tied with the same color ribbons.

"I bought some candy," he said, and without the foolish grin that would have accompanied such a gift from one of the countryside swains he handed a box to Rhoda. Then he turned to Amy. With her candy he gave one of the infrequent smiles that made one forget the fierce steadiness of his eyes, his pointed, fighter's chin, and the awe-inspiring thickness of his arms.

In that moment Rhoda Barker resolved to use the arsenic.

She had contrived that her fingers should touch his as she took the candy, and she knew that the touch had gone deeper than the surface. But he had answered Amy's eyes with a smile. Rhoda told herself that she had to use the arsenic, or lose. Lose she would not! So when the girl stepped out of the room for a moment she contrived to open the box, with her back to Martin, and drop a very tiny pinch of the white powder into Amy's cup. It lay there innocently, and disappeared when the tea was poured.

Rhoda handed the cup to her with no other feeling than a kind of tense, satisfied eagerness. But when the tea had cooled, and when Amy had taken it all, a fear came upon her.

What would happen? Had she given enough to kill? Or to make Amy ill enough so that the doctor would come and find out what was the matter? All she wanted to do was to make the girl a little sick—just so she would lose that mysterious something that made her attractive to Martin Hewes. Through half an hour Rhoda Barker suffered such terrors that it took all the power of her will to hold her hand to their tasks, to keep the sparkle in her eyes for Martin, to prevent her trembling knees letting her down into a chair.

But by the time the supper dishes were washed nothing had happened, and Rhoda felt her self-confidence returning. She began to feel a kind of contempt for the arsenic, as well as for herself. She had even begun to wonder why she had not given a larger dose when Amy, drawing a deep breath, spoke to her.

"I think I'll go to bed now, Rhoda."

With mingled fear and delight Rhoda Barker searched her face. There was no look of acute suffering—only the appearance of feeling below normal in health and spirits. Such a look as might be worn by one suffering from a headache or a slight toothache. When Amy went up-stairs, with a step a trifle slower than her usual swift movements, Rhoda became gay.

"Martin!" she cried, fairly dancing toward the rocking chair where he sat and smoked. "Come into the sitting-room and I'll play you a game of hearts."

His eyes flickered, that was all. But he rose quickly and followed her. They played cards until ten o'clock, while Rhoda knew, without looking into a mirror, that her color deepened and that she had never in her life been more powerful to draw a man. Martin told her that, without saying so, for he actually talked of things other than the work he was hired to do. His manner paid her compliments. Once or twice her hand, under the table, nursed the little blue box in her apron pocket. It had solved her problem.

From that night onward the powder in the blue box decreased little by little. Not a day passed, and some days not a meal, that Rhoda did not give a minute quantity to her stepdaughter in tea or coffee. It was absurdly easy, after all, for she sat at the head of the table, and no one but herself ever saw the white sparkle in the bottom of the girl's cup.

She dimly guessed something of the nature of cumulative effects of poison in the system, but she was not alarmed, for she did not know that death might be produced. She told herself repeatedly that she did not want to kill Amy. Just to make her sick long enough to spoil her chances with Martin. And that work was being accomplished if looks and actions spoke for anything.

Amy admitted that she seldom felt well, that she had pain, languor, and that food was at times repulsive to her. She admitted this only under questioning, and reluctantly. Rhoda was hopeful that the air with which Martin now talked to the girl was entirely impersonal. At first she felt a touch of pity for Amy, then she grew indifferent, and at length it gave her a strange, fierce pleasure to inflict the torture. When pity went there was nothing to battle against her hatred. Didn't the girl want the same man she wanted? With practise in cruelty she created an appetite for it.

Amy Barker spent part of every afternoon lying down, and every evening she went to her room early, almost as soon as the supper work was done. The light vanished from her face and the smile, as her stepmother had desired, was wiped out. Lines came at her mouth-corners and her

shoulders lost their graceful, confident set. Rhoda had Martin to herself. Every evening they played cards in the sitting-room, or sat together on the front porch.

The end of this condition, which Rhoda so desired to maintain, came before Martin had committed himself—while there was still doubt in her mind as to whether she had won him. It came at the dinner-table one Monday, after a hard half-day of washing. Amy sat with perspiration beaded about her white lips and a straight line between her brows. In spite of this, however, she made a pretense of eating; she met their eyes calmly and talked as much as had been her habit of late.

Martin had just finished his meal when Amy suddenly stood up. Her chair tipped backward. The veil of self-control melted away from her face, and it became pain haunted, terrible with suffering. Her hands groped into the air.

"I won't be sick!" she groaned.

Then she fell. Fell into a huddle of limp clothing so that she seemed no bigger than a child. Martin had leaped up as she stood groping; now he remained fixed in his place, a man of action paralyzed by Rhoda knew not what, his lips parted, his eyes staring down upon the girl.

Rhoda Parker was terrified. She screamed once; and then shut down her teeth upon her under lip for fear some word of confession would come rushing forth. She sprang around the table, wringing her hands, and dropped beside Amy.

"Get the camphor!" she cried. "Quick, man!"

He moved lightninglike to the cupboard where the medicines were kept, and in an instant knelt beside her. With indrawn breath she saw him lift Amy's head; watched him, fascinated, as his big finger dabbed camphor under the girl's nose and upon her temples. She had seen her husband die, and she knew that this was not death, although it was plain that Amy was very ill.

With the reassurance of fluttering eyelids, Rhoda became again the pantheress, defending that which she had marked down for her own. She bit her knuckles as Hewes picked Amy up in his arms and car-

ried her to her bedroom. He would have lingered beside the four-posted, chintz-curtained bed, but Rhoda swept him out quickly. When she turned to undress her stepdaughter she felt the fever of the lust to kill.

For the sake of appearances she had to summon the doctor. He came the same afternoon, wheezing up the narrow stairs, and stood with one hand under the tails of his shiny frock coat and the other caressing the whiskers that had been streaked with just so much gray ever since Rhoda had known the neighborhood. Rhoda told him how Amy had been wrenching with a series of paroxysms there under her eyes, and how the girl had been ill for a time.

"Eghm!" he coughed, counting the patient's pulse by his enormous watch. "Debility! Eghm! Eghm! What I might call a decline, Mrs. Barker, complicated by a severe intestinal disturbance. Very little food for a few days. Rest. Plenty of water. Send for me if she gets any worse. Eghm!"

He went away, leaving some white tablets "for pain" which Mrs. Barker knew from her own experience to be morphin. She had her victim now, more surely and safely than as though they were together in the depths of the mountains. Now there was nothing between her and the pallid face that lay sunk in one of the great feather pillows.

What man would fall in love with that? she thought contemptuously. A face stripped of charm. Nothing but drawn lips and dulled blue eyes and dead-looking hair. Almost she was tempted to let Amy get well in time to see her stepmother married to Martin Hewes. She ought to be satisfied, she told herself, and she knew that she would have been a few weeks before. But she had become acquainted with delight in the sight of suffering. Moreover, her hatred carried over, and she could not forget that this broken girl had been, or had seemed to be, her rival. So she put the issue of life and death away for a few days.

Certainly Amy must stay in bed. There was the morphin, with which she might easily make a mistake, and better still,

there was the little blue box that never left her apron pocket by day or her pillow by night. Time enough to decide.

Martin Hewes met her anxiously at the foot of the stairs. For the first time she thought she saw his hand tremble—thought she heard a slight catch in his voice.

"How is she?" he demanded. "What did the doctor say?"

"A decline!" She shrugged; not unsympathetically but with a hint of patient pity. "And nerves! Some women, you know, Martin—"

She smiled at him, and he answered that smile with a gleam in his eyes such as she had lately been able to rouse there at will. His interest in Amy seemed to cool.

"She'll be all right, then?"

"If she don't get all right soon I'm to send for the doctor again."

He was satisfied; and he offered to help her wipe the dishes. She gasped. It was hard to know whether to be pleased, or frightened, or regretful that this superbly chiseled giant should stand with a dish-towel in his hands and wipe plates and cups. Of course she accepted and, with triumph singing to her, she stood side by side with him at the sink through a delicious half-hour.

For the first time she felt complete power over the situation. First the girl and then the man. The two rocks were chipped—melted—worn. She was very nearly kind to Amy that night before she went to her own room.

Victory was not completely hers, as she learned during the next few days. Each morning, while she was giving Amy her breakfast of toast and milk, Hewes came to the door and knocked. Then he ducked his head so that he could clear the lintel and stepped inside where he could look down at the motionless head of limp, light-colored hair.

"Feeling better?" he would ask; and always Amy managed to bring back to her face something of the light that had been there—a little upward curve of the lips and a brave crinkle about the eyes.

"Yes—better!"

Then he would flash his own smile back

and go out, leaving something of the magnetic strength of his presence in the room. Indeed, this appeared to be a tonic to the girl, for Rhoda thought that she grew visibly a trifle stronger after each of these visits.

Amy had the will to live, and at the end of the week, during which time Rhoda had remained undecided and had given her nothing more from the little blue box, it was certain that she would get well much faster than had seemed possible in the beginning.

It was, however, the visits of Martin Hewes that brought sentence of death upon Amy Barker.

Rhoda could not more endure those daily visits to the sick room than she could endure the prospect of a re-creation of the situation as it had been, with Amy going about in buoyant strength and Martin Hewes dividing his attentions between them. Instinctively she felt that in the end the strength of the weak would overcome her. Rhoda decided to use the arsenic.

Of course she did not admit to herself that she had made up her mind to kill the sick girl there in her bed, nor that she had chosen the arsenic because it would cause suffering. But she knew that she would take the blue box out of her apron pocket when she was alone in the house with Amy, that she would give a much larger dose than usual with the assurance to herself that it was only to keep the little devil where she belonged, and that before Dr. Matthewson could be brought from the village Amy Barker would be beyond the power of medicine.

Circumstances worked together to give her immediate opportunity of the most favorable kind. The spring's work pressed to be done because the frost had been late getting out of the ground, and on the Monday following that of Amy's attack Hewes was up long before daylight and in the fields as soon as he could see to work. Rhoda had got his breakfast by lamplight. Soon after sunrise her kitchen duties were finished. She prepared the toast and milk for Amy. They were not only alone together in the house, but Martin was planting corn in a remote field—without having

made his morning visit. There was no reason to expect the presence of a third person there until he came in for dinner at noon.

Rhoda's mind leaped ahead, refusing to recognize the true nature of the act which she was about to commit within the next ten minutes. If the little dose of arsenic that she intended to give Amy should make the girl worse, very much worse, then it would be necessary to get help, as the doctor had said. She, Rhoda, would run to the field for Martin. Of course she could not be expected to know that Amy was about to die. So Martin would bring the horses into the barn, take off their work harness, and put a driving harness on one of them. Then he would go to the village, and he might find Dr. Matthewson out on his round of calls. He probably would find him out in the morning. Amy did not have much chance.

She was much better when Rhoda inspected her closely in the clear morning light. She could as yet barely lift her head from the pillow, but the faint tint of health was returning to her skin. And she smiled at her stepmother.

"You've been good to me," she said.

That remark roused such fury in Rhoda Barker that she shut both hands hard upon the tray and hurried to the little table that she was in the habit of moving up to the bedside. Was the girl a liar or a fool? Could nothing make her hate? She had got angry that day in the kitchen, but it had been only a flash. And she had been steadily losing Martin to her rival! What was the matter with her? Rhoda Barker was filled with but one desire—to crush Amy, suffering, out of existence.

She stood with her back to the bed, in front of the table, making a pretense of arranging the tray. The little blue box came stealthily out of her pocket. Her hand did not tremble now, so obsessed was she by her single emotion. With a spoon she took up three, or four, or maybe half a dozen times as much arsenic as she had ever given before. It disappeared in the milk.

It was just then that Rhoda became conscious of another presence in the room.

The spoon remained poised. It was a matter of a second, two seconds, before she lifted her head. She looked into the face of Martin Hewes, who stood well within the doorway. He was motionless, silent, watching her, his arms hanging at his sides. The eyes of Amy were fixed upon him. In them pleasure struggled with a vague and growing alarm.

These things Rhoda saw at one sweeping glance. The situation itself did not terrify her. She had discounted such an accident long before, and she was prepared to explain the blue box.

But this was not the Martin Hewes whom she knew. Under the brown of his skin blood suffused the capillaries. His eyes were opalescent, like the eyes of an enraged dog. Yet he stood immovable.

"I wanted to see—how she was," he said thickly. "So I left the work."

Rhoda was astonished. He spoke like a hired man explaining to his employer. But her terror of him was in no way diminished. She shivered.

"Martin!" in a half whisper. "You frightened me—I—"

As a dam breaks, so his restraint gave way. A single movement and he stood in front of her, very close.

"What's in that box?" The sound of his voice filled the room.

"Medicine!" It was a mechanical word, jarred out of her. "The doctor—he gave it—he—"

"You murderer!"

"You lie!" she screamed. She could

not move, nor shape her thoughts coherentely. "I didn't! It's medicine—"

He picked up the glass and lifted it toward his mouth. Not until she saw the milk white against his lips did she act—then her fingers wrenched it from his grasp.

"I knew it!" he thundered. "Murder was in your face when I stepped through that doorway!"

His form seemed to expand to gigantic proportions. His big hands reached out and clutched her by the wrist, swung her into the air as no other man in that town could have done, and pinned her against the wall high from the floor. Her arms flung out, and for an instant lay as though she had been crucified. The blue box thumped into a corner, spilling white powder.

She saw death in his face, and the fear of death was upon her. His hands crushed in her ribs. She knew the agony of her last moment.

"Martin!" she whimpered. "I was afraid—you'd fall in love with her!"

As quickly as Martin Hewes had struck he released her. She clung to a window casing for support, dazed. She saw his face change. The knotted forehead smoothed and blood came back to his lips as they relaxed. He laughed. But to her ears his laughter was no less terrible than his wrath.

"I do love her," he said, "but I didn't know it until she got sick that day at the table. Before that *I thought I was in love with you!*"

## THE SECRET

I SHAME myself that I cannot  
A simple secret keep.  
Last night I walked the garden plot  
Because I could not sleep;

And there beside the listening rose  
I spoke my heart aloud—  
The rose this morning redder glows,  
With conscious blushes bowed;

Oh, I shall pluck thee, traitor rose,  
And shut thee in my book;  
Thy breathing doth my heart disclose,  
And thy too conscious look!

Alvin West.



# The Master of Magic

by Paul L. Anderson

Author of "The Cave That Swims on the Water," "The Lord of the Winged Death," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE CHALLENGE.

IT was a bright, warm day in early autumn; the mild afternoon sun touching with gold the trees and brush of the hills at whose foot lay the homes of the Ta-an, the People of the Mountain Caves. Down the narrow trail which angled along the hillside, from mountain-top to river, there walked with hurried steps a young man of some twenty-two or twenty-three years, his single scanty garment of leopard-skin, his ax and lance and dagger, oak-hasted, headed with finely chipped flint, proclaiming him one of the warrior clan.

This announcement was confirmed by the great war-bow, well-nigh as long as its owner was tall, that, with a quiver of arrows, hung from his shoulder, and also by the shield, round, a cubit across, of triple raw-hide, which bore the square cross of red and yellow, the insignia of the Company of the Bear, battle company of the Ta-an.

The young man's long, firm, muscular limbs spoke of speed and skill in the chase, his strong chin and high-arched nose of courage in battle, his bright, quick-darting eye of instant decision, nor was this last prediction false, for, hearing a slight noise behind him on the steep trail, the youth instantly leaped one side into the brush, not turning his head till after the leap.

Far above him he caught a fleeting glimpse of a man who dived swiftly into the bushes, and even as the young warrior exclaimed: "Tsu-ven!" there hurtled past him, leaping, bounding, a tremendous boulder, half as high as a man, that, missing him by a hair's-breadth, rushed on, crashing through the brush, smashing down small trees, tearing branches from larger ones, and at last, with ever-increasing speed, ended its thunderous flight in a gigantic bound that carried it into the river. The young man watched for some moments the widening ripples of its splash, wondering to himself.

"Why," he murmured, "why should Tsu-ven, son to the great chieftain, seek my life? Or was it by chance that the rock fell? No"—he shook his head decidedly—"no, had it been chance Tsu-ven had shouted, nor had he sought to hide when I turned. But in very truth, why should he seek to slay me? Never have I harmed him!"

He shook his head again over the puzzle, and, avoiding the narrow trail, pushed through the undergrowth to take his way once more down the mountain. But it seemed as though Fate had it in store to delay him, to prevent his obeying the command that had turned his steps from the hunt, for hardly had he gone ten paces through the brush before a deep, rumbling

growl brought him to a halt, even as there burst upon him a vision of terror, a huge she-bear, closely followed by two cubs.

Nan-a-ta—for that was the youth's name—was indeed no coward; fronting the angry beast as, teeth showing in a ferocious snarl, she rushed on him, he thrust strongly at her with his lance. A lightning stroke of the savage paw hurled the weapon aside, splintered, and the warrior had barely time to seize the ax from his girdle before the bear was on him—he struck, wounding her deeply—another blow—the ax spun from his grip—Nan-a-ta, dodging, leaped for the nearest tree, and scrambled madly upward—the bear, rising on her hind feet, struck savagely at him—her claws caught in the bow-string—and Nan-a-ta's arms were torn loose from the tree.

But his legs, the feet crossed, were clamped about the trunk, and instantly he slipped the bow from his shoulder. With a mighty effort lifted his body—caught with his hands, and climbed swiftly up, even as another blow of those terrible claws gashed his thigh. Up and up he climbed, till, ten times the height of a tall man from the earth, he flung himself, panting, astride of a stout limb, and looked down.

The bear was climbing the tree! In his haste to escape the death which waited him, Nan-a-ta had chosen the first tree that came to hand, and, by evil fortune, this chanced to be one large enough for the beast to grip with her claws.

It was a tall tree; towering above its fellows, it overlooked the slope of the hill, the broad river, the valley, and the hills beyond, a vision of beauty in the rich colors of autumn, red of maple, yellow of birch, bronze of oak. At another time the young man had stopped to admire, for he was by no means insensible to the loveliness of nature—indeed, there had been some debate whether he should be inducted into the warrior or the artist clan—but now there was no time for such things; death was climbing the tree—and his weapons lay below!

Nearer and nearer came the bear, and the youth could plainly see the gleaming teeth, the long, curved claws, razor-sharp, deadly; he could catch the shine of the little, wicked eyes; he could hear the panting of the beast

and see the red tongue lolling from her jaws; far below, the cubs whined in their eagerness, capering about on the ground; once the bear slipped, and Nan-a-ta caught his breath sharply—no, she but slid down a few feet, and, recovering herself, came on once more.

Nan-a-ta, facing ever toward his pursuer, edged farther and farther out on the branch and now the bear had reached it; cautiously she rested one foot on it, to try its strength, and then, balancing carefully, one slow step at a time, she inched out to where the youth clung.

And now despair seized the warrior; he felt his end was at hand, and something like a sob caught in his throat, to be instantly choked down—a warrior of the Taaan must meet death bravely! Yet this was different from fronting it in battle; more than once had Nan-a-ta faced death in war; more than once had he fought with fierce animals; yet to be hurled to earth from the branches of a tree and devoured, unhonored, by wild beasts—the thought was agony. Anxiously he looked about for some possible succor. Slightly above him and a few feet away he saw the branch of another tree, and the thought came that perchance he could leap to that. Slowly, cautiously, he raised himself on his hands, bending forward the while, till he set his feet on the limb beneath him—balancing with wide-spread arms, he steadied himself—he bent his knees—nearer drew the bear—and even as the beast struck Nan-a-ta sprang!

With all his might he sprang, flinging himself toward the bough—he fell short—his fingers grasped a little branch, which was torn through his hand—and he fell. But not far; some ten or twelve feet below another limb broke his fall, and instinctively, unthinking, he flung his arms about it, holding fast, though sick and dizzy, and as he clung a snarl of rage sounded almost in his ear, a vast, furry body plunged past him, and Nan-a-ta, looking down, saw the bear, jerked from the limb by the recoil of his leap strike the ground far below with a thud.

Faint and with swimming head the youth watched, but the bear did not move, though

the cubs whined and licked her, and at length he concluded that she had been killed by the fall, so, climbing slowly down, he recovered his weapons and turned to skin the beast.

But even as he strung his bow to test it the bear got to her feet, stood a moment, swaying, and to the young man's horror made toward him—the fall had but stunned her!

The shock was great; from safety to imminent peril in a breath—enough to unman the stoutest. But Nan-a-ta whipped a handful of arrows from the quiver that still clung to his shoulder and quick as a striking snake, as the bear lurched toward him, he sped four into the huge brown beast.

So swift were his motions that the arrows seemed to stream from the bow—one had scarce come to rest ere another followed—and still the bear came on. Another flight—the bear hesitated—wavered—swayed—another—toppling, she fell, the blood gushing from her mouth—one convulsive effort, one struggle, and she lay still.

With speeding arrows Nan-a-ta slew the cubs, then, faint and weak, sank to the ground, resting his trembling limbs. Presently he rose, took his dagger, and cut the claws from the three bears. He gazed regretfully at the carcasses, saying, half aloud:

"Would that I might take the hides! Left here, vultures and hyenas will ruin them ere I can return! But the great chieftain waits, nor will be brook delay in answering his summons!"

And the son of A-ta, carrying the claws, tokens of his victory, took his way again down the mountain to the cave of the great chief.

For well-nigh forty years had T-san-vamen, Lord of the Winged Death, ruled over the Ta-an. In his youth exiled for his evil ways, he had none the less borne in mind the welfare of his tribe, and, inventor of the bow and arrow, he had trained his score of followers, exiles like himself, in the use of the Winged Death.

When the tribesmen were assailed and like to be overcome by their enemies, the exiles, striking in with the new weapon, had turned the tide of battle, and for this deed,

repenting of their former disregard of laws, they were received once more among their fellows, the leader becoming chieftain on the death of his predecessor.

And well indeed had he ruled the tribe. Leading them to this new home in the Land of the Dying Sun, he had fought many battles, ever-victorious, with the Little Hairy Men, establishing the Ta-an firmly in the valley where they now lived. Ever laboring for the tribe, regardless of self, the Lord of the Winged Death was loved and respected by all his followers.

And now the great chieftain lay dying. Tracking down a lion, the terrible fear that walks the night, he had attacked the great beast single-handed, as he had often done before. But this time his strength had failed him, and though he had slain the beast he had received many and deep wounds, and now, his hours numbered, he lay in his cave waiting the coming of Nan-a-ta, whom the chieftain's messenger had overtaken as he went to hunt.

Nothing of the chieftain's wounds did Nan-a-ta know; the messenger had but summoned him to the cave of the great chief, and the youth supposed merely that some errand awaited him.

Coming to the great cave beside the river, Nan-a-ta climbed quickly up the ladder—trunk of a tree with toe-holds chopped on each side—which led to the cave-mouth some fifteen feet above the little slope which rose an equal height above the river.

Within, a dozen men were ranged about a couch of skins whereon lay the Lord of the Winged Death, and these, parting at the youth's approach, gave space for him to draw near the dying man.

The cave was large and spacious, riven in the hillside partly by the hands of men, but more by a little stream which for countless ages had trickled through from above; the walls and roof were covered with paintings of wild horse and bison, mammoth and reindeer, executed by the artists of the tribe, who, incising the outlines deeply in the rock, had filled in with red and yellow pigments till the bas-reliefs seemed alive, and in the half-light of evening, aided by flickering lamps and torches, one could almost see the hunters following their prey.

But all this was well known to Nan-a-ta; he had spent many hours here, talking with the great chieftain and looking carefully at the work of the artists, for the young man was a favorite of the Lord of the Winged Death. Therefore, he spared no glance for the surroundings, but fell on his knees beside the couch of thick-piled skins where lay his adored leader. It was evident even to the youth that no man could survive the terrible wounds which covered the chieftain's body, and as this knowledge came home to him hot tears sprang to the warrior's eyes.

"Nay, weep not, son of A-ta," said the chieftain. "Death comes to all, and far better is it to pass thus into the long dark than to live till the bones weaken and the blood turns to water." He turned to L'vu, his old friend and chosen lieutenant, who stood near, and spoke two words:

"The staff." At once the burly L'vu, tears running down his cheeks and coursing over the scars of many battles, moved to a little shelf hewn in the rock, and took therefrom a roll of skins which he handed to the chieftain. The latter turned again to Nan-a-ta.

"Son of A-ta," he said, in a failing voice, "many years since, as you have heard, A-ta, your mother whom I loved even as my own daughter did good service to the Ta-an, inventing the canoe, the cave that swims on the water, since used and long to be used by the tribesmen in war and in peace. For this service was it vowed to her that her son should be great chieftain of the Ta-an in my stead, when should come that hour in which I must go to join my fathers."

"Now is that hour at hand; take you this staff of ceremony, carven by artists of olden time from the tooth of Do-m'-rai, the Hill That Walks; holding it in your right hand, do you swear to lead well the tribesmen, serving the Ta-an in all things, ever forgetful of yourself, regarding not safety nor comfort, sparing nor life nor limb in the service of the tribe? Swear!"

And unrolling the skins, the chieftain placed in Nan-a-ta's hand the ivory staff, a cubit in length, graven with figures of men and beasts. Reverently the youth took the staff, and in a firm voice he spoke:

"Even as you have said, so do I swear, the Great Father aiding me, to spare neither life nor limb in the service of the Ta-an, but to lead them well and truly so long as strength remains in my body and breath in my nostrils!"

"It is well!" said the chieftain. "L'vu, Sar-no-m'rai, Kan-to, Sen-va, friends of my youth, bear witness to what you have heard. You others as well. Son of A-ta, these may you trust; they will not fail you. Others of the Ta-an as well, save only Tsu-ven, my son; Tsu-ven is a grief to me—him can you not trust—my heart is heavy for him."

Nan-a-ta thought of the huge rock which had so nearly crushed him that very day, but he said naught, wishing to spare the chieftain the sorrow of knowing his only son for a treacherous and cowardly assassin. Presently the chieftain's eye caught the caked and hardened blood on the young man's thigh, and he spoke again, anxiously:

"Son of A-ta, Great Chieftain of the Ta-an, you are wounded?"

Nan-a-ta thrilled at the title, highest among the tribesmen, thus bestowed on him, but he answered calmly enough, saying:

"Nay, great chieftain, it is naught." And briefly he told of his adventure with the bear, showing the claws he had taken from the beasts. The dying chieftain smiled and answered:

"It is well; a brave man leads the Ta-an in my place." Then, turning to the others, he said:

"Make now obeisance to your new chief, vowing allegiance to him."

One by one the others drew near, each in turn kneeling before Nan-a-ta and laying the new leader's hands on his neck while the vows were sworn. And when the ceremony was completed and they turned again to T'san-va-men he lay quiet, a gentle smile on his lips; the noble spirit had fled into the long dark.

Wordless, as became warriors, they stood long by the body; no sound of wailing was there—let that be left to the women—but silent though they stood, tears coursed down the stern, war-hardened faces, for these men

had loved their chief. At length spoke Nan-a-ta, the new chieftain:

"Let the priests be summoned; Men-ah, be that your task. Bid them prepare the body for burial, three days hence, as is the law. To my cave go I, there to fast and pray till such time as the body of the Lord of the Winged Death be laid at rest."

Obedient, Men-ah, a youth of the new chieftain's age and like him of the warrior clan, went on his errand, and the others stood silent till Sa-ko, chief priest of the Ta-an, entered, followed by four priests of the great altar; the priests of the lesser altar might not touch the body of a chieftain.

Then the warriors withdrew, each to his own cave, and Sa-ko, with his assistants, made ready the body for burial, binding it in a sitting position with thongs from the hide of a bison—it was with the Company of the Bison that T'san-va-men had marched to war—placing the insignia of the bison, concentric circles of red and yellow ocher, specially ground in the sacred mortar, on the forehead, casting about the neck a chain of sacred shells, and placing in the hands of the dead chieftain his ax and dagger, his lance and bow and arrows, that he might have weapons for hunting or for defense in the spirit-land.

For three days they watched, turn about, beside the body, and on the day appointed for the funeral the body was placed on a litter and borne by four priests to the great altar, far up the hillside. On a level plaza about the altar were gathered the tribesmen, and as the litter passed they fell on their knees, leaving open a lane through which the priests marched, lifting their voices in a weird rhythmic chant which had been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation—if the word may be used of celibates—of the hierarchy of the Ta-an.

There followed prayers and chants, wailing of women and songs of warriors, till at the last the body was placed within the cave already prepared in the hillside back of the great altar, food was laid beside it, and rocks, great enough to tax the strength of all the priests together, were rolled in to close the opening—the Lord of the Winged

Death, facing toward the sunrise, sat in his last long sleep.

The burial completed, the priests turned again from the sealed cave, coming forward, three abreast, to the altar, where they halted and spread out in a semicircle behind the flat-topped pile of stones, high as a man's shoulder.

The massed tribesmen, with their women and children, still knelt, the front rank, composed of warriors, but a few paces away, Nan-a-ta and Tsu-ven conspicuous among them.

Standing out before the crowd, Sa-ko, chief priest of the Ta-an, flung wide his arms, and cried in a loud voice, the deep-throated, sonorous tones ringing far over the valley as he addressed the multitude:

"People of the Mountain Caves," he cried, "our leader, T'san-va-men, Lord of the Winged Death, has left us. Unavailing our prayers, our entreaties; no more does he lead us; never again shall his battle-cry summon the warriors to the fight, nor again shall his hunting-call draw the huntsmen to their prey. In the deep cave looking toward the birth of day, rests his body; for three days has his spirit fled through the dark places, and at last it rests in peace, in the glorious company of his fathers, in the place of good. Happy is T'san-va-men, Lord of the Winged Death!"

"But leaderless we; among the tribesmen none may call the warriors to battle or the hunters to the chase. Not well is this—choose we now a chieftain, people of the mountain caves! Ever is it the custom for the great chieftain, as his end draws nigh, to name who shall follow, placing in the hand of such a one the staff of ceremony, carven from the tooth of the Hill That Walks; comes none forward, bearing this token, the token by which he shall lead the Ta-an?"

These words of the chief priest were of formula—part of the ritual of induction whereby the new chieftain was installed, and as Sa-ko raised his voice in question Nan-a-ta rose from where he knelt, stepped forward, and knelt again at the feet of Sa-ko, holding up the ivory staff, that all might see.

"Sa-Ko, chief priest, and People of the

Mountain Caves," cried Nan-a-ta, "behold here the staff, given into my hands by the Lord of the Winged Death, ere his spirit fled into the long dark. By this token know all that I, even I, Nan-a-ta, son to A-ta, the woman of the mountain caves, and her husband, Menzono, Slayer of Wolves, am now great chieftain of the Ta-an. Knowing this, seeing the token I bear, bow ye to the staff, vowing allegiance to your chieftain, even as I have vowed allegiance to the chieftain, even as I have vowed alliance to the Ta-an!"

These words also were part of the ritual, and Sa-ko, as prescribed, stretched out his hand to take and examine the ivory staff, when there came an unexpected interruption. Rising to his feet—leaping, rather—Tsu-ven cried loudly:

"This may not be!"

At once all eyes turned toward the son of the Lord of the Winged Death as he stood facing the chief priest. Cries of wonder, murmurs of astonishment ran through the crowd, for never before had the ceremony in induction of a chieftain been broken into, and many feared a judgment for the sacrilege. But Tsu-ven stood forth boldly, nor did the lightning from above blast him; firmly he repeated:

"This may not be!" and Sa-ko, leaving Nan-a-ta still kneeling, came two steps forward, asking:

"Son of the Lord of the Winged Death, wherefore shall it not be? Tell now before all how it comes that you dare challenge the son of A-ta!"

"Sa-ko, Chief Priest, and People of the Mountain Caves," said Tsu-ven, "it is the custom that the leader of the Ta-an be one who has aided the tribesmen either in peace or in war, who has done something of great merit. To Nan-a-ta was promised the chieftaincy for that his mother first made and gave to the tribe the Cave That Swims on The Water. Was this a deed of Nan-a-ta? Shall the leader's staff be given him for his mother's deed? Is not my own claim as strong? Was it not my father who gave the tribe the bow and arrow? Was not his name 'Lord of the Winged Death'? In very truth, my right is greater than that of Nan-a-ta!"

"Yet behind lies more. Into my hand did the Lord of the Winged Death give the staff; from me was it stolen, taken from my cave at night while I slept, and given by the thief to Nan-a-ta. Who was the thief? Nay, that can I not say for certain and with full assurance—yet this can I say in truth, that he was doubtless close friend to my father, and he was lame!"

At these words a murmur rose from the crowd, for all knew that Kan-to, boyhood friend to the Lord of the Winged Death, limped, having one leg shorter than the other. From Kan-to there burst a shout:

"He lies!" and the others who had been present when the dying chieftain gave over the staff joined in: "He lies! He speaks with two tongues! Liar! Liar!"

Sa-ko raised his hand, stilling the tumult, and when this had died from shout and roar to growl, and from growl—and rumble to silence, he spoke:

"Grave words are these; a matter of weight! By the law I, Sa-ko, Chief Priest, am now ruler of the Ta-an till a chieftain shall be chosen. Two men offer, each saying the other speaks with two tongues. So be it! Between them will I decide. To the Lesser Altar, all!"

And leading the way, the priests moved some three hundred paces along the side of the mountain to the Lesser Altar, close followed by Tau-ven and Nan-a-ta—behind them the crowd, pushing and jostling in their eagerness to find places in the front rank.

## CHAPTER II.

### THAUMATURGY.

**F**OR all their pretended astonishment, Tsu-ven's announcement was no surprise to Sa-ko or to the other priests; they knew well that it was coming, and, indeed, it was in some measure due to Sa-ko that Tsu-ven had dared protest.

Tsu-ven, son to the Lord of the Winged Death, was a man of some thirty-seven or thirty-eight years, a brave and skilful warrior, a hunter of note, and, though still unmarried, a man of weight in the tribe. In youth he had marched to war with his

father, his first adventure of the sort coming when, a boy of fourteen, he had gone with the tribesmen on the very expedition whereon A-ta had invented the canoe.

He had borne himself well, earning commendation from the older warriors, and his youth had promised well, a promise that was fulfilled so far as skill with weapons was concerned. But Tsu-ven had felt himself aggrieved at the promise made to A-ta; he felt his right to the chieftaincy was greater than that of her son, and for some years past, as he saw Nan-a-ta growing in honor among the tribesmen, he had labored by hint and innuendo, by word and look, to draw the warriors to himself, diverting their allegiance from Nan-a-ta.

In this effort he had so far succeeded that about half the warriors and hunters of the tribe—that is, the trained users of weapons—were his firm adherents, ready to defend his claim against that of the son of A-ta, to take up arms in his behalf.

The Lord of the Winged Death knew naught of this, nor did Nan-a-ta—indeed, had the chieftain realized it he would undoubtedly have ordered his son slain or at least exiled, for the chieftain of the Ta-an owned the power of life and death among the tribesmen, and brooked no opposition to his decrees.

But Tsu-ven moved secretly and with skill, pretending friendship for Nan-a-ta, so that the latter was honestly amazed when he recognized Tsu-ven as the one who had endeavored to roll the rock on him. This act was one of impulse; Tsu-ven, knowing that his father's end drew near, and seeing Nan-a-ta below him on the trail, had pushed the boulder behind which he was hiding, for the thought had struck him that Nan-a-ta's death would solve his problem or at least make easier his path.

But the rock had missed; the keen ears of the trained hunter had warned him of the danger, and his instant action, result of constant peril—for in the forests a man's life depended daily, hourly, on unfaltering readiness—had saved his life.

And Tsu-ven had watched with eagerness the struggle with the bear; hidden behind the brush, he had thrice lifted his bow to speed an arrow into the defenceless body

of Nan-a-ta, and thrice had he held his hand, for an arrow might be traced.

A rock might fall by chance, death might come in a fight with wild beasts, but the wound of an arrow must be explained!

So Nan-a-ta, intent on the bear, and unconscious of the second peril that lurked unseen, had escaped and gone his way, and it was necessary for Tsu-ven to find some other method to sweep his rival one side.

As has been said, Tsu-ven counted among his adherents full half the weapon-trained men of the Ta-an, but even so he dared not think himself secure. In open battle, face to face, the others of the Ta-an would weigh down the scale, for though the artists and artisans might not claim the skill with bow and arrow, with lance and ax and dagger that was characteristic of the warriors and hunters, yet no man of the tribe could reach his growth without knowing somewhat of the use of weapons—every man was a potential fighter.

So Tsu-ven, to insure success, decided to avail himself, if possible, of the power of religion, appealing to the tribesmen through their reverence for the priesthood, and to that end he sought alliance with Sa-ko.

The evening of the day when the Lord of the Winged Death passed into the Long Dark Tsu-ven presented himself at the Chief Priest's cave. Sa-ko had returned from preparing the chieftain's body, the other priests taking the task of watching, and he had just finished his supper when Tsu-ven appeared. The sun had set, and without the cave the dusk was gathering in; the beasts of the night were abroad, and in the sky above the stars began to show, twinkling spots of gold in the deep blue.

Outside, the weird barking laugh of the hyenas that roamed the forest, and from time to time the deep roar of the lion; within, the glowing embers of the fire and the flickering light of the lamps, shallow bowls of stone, fed with the fat of beasts. And by the fire the Chief Priest, seated, looking up to greet the traitorous son of the dead chieftain.

Tsu-ven drew near and bowed respectfully to the priest, who with a wave of his hand bade the newcomer be seated. Tsu-ven squatted on his haunches and remained

silent, straining for words; Sa-ko did not speak, knowing well that in debate or argument the one to open the discussion placed himself at a disadvantage. Presently Tsu-ven said, hesitatingly:

"A chieftain is lacking to the Ta-an."

"Nay," replied the priest, "the son of A-ta holds the ivory staff."

Tsu-ven fell into another brooding silence, gazing into the fire, while the Chief Priest glanced at him with twinkling eyes, with suppressed amusement. At length Tsu-ven burst out:

"Why should the ivory staff fall to Nan-a-ta? Wherein is his merit greater than mine? Did not the father of Tsu-ven as much and more for the Ta-an than the mother of Nan-a-ta? Wherefore, then, should not Tsu-ven lead the People of the Mountain Caves?"

"Wherefore, in very truth?" responded the priest, and Tsu-ven glanced up, surprised at the note of encouragement in Sa-ko's voice. He eyed the priest questioningly, but Sa-ko gazed steadily into the fire, his face expressionless. By and by Tsu-ven continued, lowering his voice and leaning toward Sa-ko:

"Sa-ko, Chief Priest of the Ta-an," he said, "full half the men of arms of the tribe follow me rather than Nan-a-ta."

"That is well known to me," replied Sa-ko dryly, and Tsu-ven drew back, aghast that the tale of his treason was known to one outside the circle of his adherents. But Sa-ko spoke reassuringly:

"Nay, son of the chieftain, had I desired your death, a word to your father or to one of his followers, within the past three years, and my wish had been accomplished! Speak on!"

"You favor me?" Tsu-ven asked, slowly.

"Nay, that is yet to see! At least do I not oppose; if reason there be, perchance may Sa-ko aid."

"The other priests; know they as well?"

"Nay, your plot is known but to me and to those sworn to you."

An evil thought flashed through the mind of Tsu-ven; were the Chief Priest out of the way, there would be no chance of opposition save from the followers of Nan-a-ta. With the thought Tsu-ven's hand stole to

the long, keen dagger of flint which hung at his girdle, and he leaned forward as though to rise and spring on Sa-ko.

The latter noted the move, smiled slightly, and without stirring from his place whistled shrilly between his teeth. At once the twelve minor priests stepped within the cave, each fully armed, with arrow on string, and advanced toward the fire.

Tsu-ven looked about at the threatening faces, and sank back, his hand falling from the dagger-hilt; Sa-ko waved his hand, and the priests withdrew outside the cave.

"You wish to speak with me; speak on!" said the Chief Priest, but Tsu-ven, a coward at heart when certain death fronted him—though brave enough in battle and the chase—still shook at the peril that had drawn so near. At length he recovered himself and said:

"Sa-ko, Chief Priest of the Ta-an, it is my desire to hold the ivory staff, to lead the People of the Mountain Caves. This may not be without the aid of the priests; the weight of battle is against me, yet, aided by the ministers of religion, the ivory staff, symbol of the chieftaincy, may yet be mine. Will you aid?"

"Why should we aid? Is it not the will of the Lord of the Winged Death that the son of A-ta be chief?"

Tsu-ven leaned nearer, bending across the hearth, whereon now only embers glowed. The faces of the two men, of the priest, strong and stern, and of the younger warrior, handsome, yet with a hint of weakness in the chin, were illuminated, tinged to a gleaming red by the glow from the coals. Tsu-ven's voice fell to a whisper, barely heard by Sa-ko, as he replied:

"Many years since did Snorr, Great Chieftain of the Ta-an, set aside the custom of offering men and women on the Great Altar, decreeing that none save beasts should there be slain. What if once more the priests might choose victims from among captives? And perchance"—he leaned still farther forward, and his voice dropped lower still—"and perchance, after a time, from among the tribesmen?"

Sa-ko sat motionless; not a muscle moved, but his deep-set eyes gleamed under their shaggy brows, for he knew well that

could the custom of human sacrifices be instituted once more the power of the priest clan would grow apace till in the end they might again, as in earlier time, outweigh the warrior clan—perhaps even the Great Chieftain himself.

"Is it in your mind that this be done?" he asked, and Tsu-ven nodded.

"Not in my power will it lie to order thus," he said, "yet would I not hinder—nay, even throw my weight on the side of the priests."

"Would the tribesmen go soon to war?"

"In very truth. Let me but hold the ivory staff, and not long shall the altar go bare of victims. First, of course, must captives be offered."

"That, of course," said Sa-ko.

"And the priests will aid?"

For a time the Chief Priest remained silent, looking ever into the embers. At length he raised his head and gazed full into Tsu-ven's eyes, and the warrior shrank from the stern glare of the older man.

"It is said!" replied Sa-ko, and Tsu-ven repeated:

"It is said!"

Tsu-ven rose and was about to turn from the cave, but the priest motioned him to sit, and he sank once more by the fire. And now the true characters of the men first showed, for Sa-ko took the lead, instructing the warrior how to proceed when the fated time should arrive, Tsu-ven listening respectfully.

"See to it," said the priest, "that your warriors come betimes to the ceremony; let them, carrying arms, take place in the front rank, not quarreling, not fighting, but none the less firmly. Instruct some half-score that they saw the staff placed in your hands and heard the chieftain name you to follow him. Then, when Nan-a-ta comes forward to claim the chieftaincy, do you put forth your claim, saying that the staff was stolen from you as you slept. Say that the footprints in and about your cave show the thief to be lame; thus shall Kan-to be accused—and it may be that we can cause him to be slain, for Kan-to and Sar-nom'rai are most crafty of those who follow Nan-a-ta."

"Is not L'vu to be feared as well?"

"L'vu is a bull of the bison herd," snorted the priest. "Strong of arm is he, but slow of wit. He is not to be feared. The rest may you leave to me. Between you and Nan-a-ta will I decide, leaving the issue to magic. Should I declare for a trial by omens, do you agree, having faith?"

"In very truth," responded Tsu-ven, humbly, "in very truth, Great Priest, well is it known that your magic is strong, yet—"

"Yet?"

"Yet do I fear. It is whispered that magic is known to Nan-a-ta as well, he having learned from Kan-to. May not his magic be stronger than your own?"

Sa-ko laughed.

"Nay," said he, "the magic is but for the crowd. No trial of skill shall there be. It is but to sway the tribesmen that I will put forth my power!"

Still Tsu-ven hesitated, doubtful. Sa-ko leaned forward and swept his hand over the dying fire. Instantly within the cave there came a flash of lightning followed by crackling thunder, dense clouds of smoke rolled upward from the hearth, spreading through the cave, filling it with a pungent odor, and from out the clouds there issued groans and cries, screams of fighting men and shrieks of agony, the clash of weapons, twanging of bows, and all the uproar and tumult of battle.

Terrified, cold to his marrow, his knees shaking, Tsu-ven leaped to his feet and stood hesitant, doubtful whether to flee or to remain. At length the noise quieted, the smoke cleared away, and all was still once more. Sa-ko gazed steadily at the warrior, who, still trembling with fright, looked wildly about, then fell on his knees before the priest.

"Your words shall be done," he quavered, and Sa-ko replied:

"It is well; go now."

Tsu-ven made his way from the cave and down the hill toward the river, and when the sound of his passage had died away Sa-ko called loudly:

"Nu-ko!"

At once a young priest entered the cave and bowed respectfully before his superior, who said:

"Nu-ko, the third day hence comes Tsu-ven before the Great Altar to claim the chieftaincy of the Ta-an. The priest clan will support his claim; magic is needed. Go you, therefore, and slay a wild horse. Be secret; see that none knows your deed. From the tail bring the six longest hairs; knot them together firmly in such wise as to make two long strings. Seek out also the home of the wild bees, bringing as much wax as may serve to cover the nail of your thumb. Go swiftly; let none know. It is said!"

"It is said!" replied Nu-ko, and turned away on his errand. But at the mouth of the cave he halted, returning to kneel before Sa-ko.

"Speak!" said the latter, and the young man answered:

"Master, I sit at your feet, seeking ever to learn. As you ordered, so did we. When the lightning flashed before Tsu-ven we others, without, cried through the rift in the rocks, striking together stones, twanging bows, shrieking and groaning, that the sound might carry into the clouds within. But—master, I seek to grow great in the wisdom of our clan—whence came the lightning and the smoke that rolled upward? Is it permitted that this be made known to me?"

Sa-ko's face grew grave.

"This is of the mysteries of the priestly clan," he said. "Is your oath remembered?"

"In very truth, master! 'Never to reveal, by word or act or sign, one slightest thing of the priestly magic, lest I vanish forever from the sight of men, even as did Ten-ko of olden time, false to his vows.'"

"It is well! Know then, that passing my hand above the fire, I let fall therein powdered gum from the resinous trees that grow in the forest; hence the strong-smelling smoke which filled the cave. Mixed therewith, dust from the Foot of Menzono\*; hence the lightning. Is it known?"

"Is that all?" asked Nu-ko, in amazement.

"It is all."

A slow smile spread over the face of the young priest, to be instantly smitten therefrom by the angry glare of Sa-ko and his harsh, menacing words:

"Your oath! This is of priestly magic, unknown to the tribesmen." Humbly, reverently, the young priest bowed, saying:

"Master, I give thanks that I am permitted to know!" And turning, he hurried from the cave.

Sa-ko sat for a time meditating, planning, then rolled himself in skins and laid him down to sleep.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE OATH OF NAN-A-TA.

SO it was that Tsu-ven's claim and his accusation came not as a surprise to the priests, though the tribesmen were thunderstruck at the unheard-of occurrence. And much eager questioning was there as the crowd moved to the Lesser Altar, where questions of tribal policy too grave for the Rock of Council were decided.

Whisperings, wondering looks, outright questions—these all flew back and forth from man to man, but the only answer was a puzzled shake of the head or: "Nay, I know naught thereof."

When the altar was reached Sa-ko placed himself behind the flat-topped waist-high pile of rocks, the other priests grouping themselves—as he had previously instructed them—in a semi-circle whose wings extended about the ends of the altar.

In front, four or five paces away, stood Tsu-ven and Nan-a-ta, side by side, the latter wondering as much as any of the tribe; it had never entered his mind that another could claim the chieftainship, though, indeed, the honor was not of his seeking. Behind the two claimants, some

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—\* From the name given by Sa-ko, "Foot of Menzono"—literally, "Wolf's Foot"—and from the behavior of the dust, it seems probable that the powder in question was from the spore-cases of *Lycopodium clavatum* or *Lycopodium Selago*, very common varieties of moss. This dust is used even at the present time in the manufacture of fireworks and for theatrical lightning.

ten paces away, the crowd closed in as near as ritual permitted, drawing in at the sides, the better to see and hear. All stood; it was but at the Great Altar that one must kneel.

"People of the Mountain Caves," cried the Chief Priest in a loud voice, "there come before us two, claiming each the ivory staff, symbol of the chieftain of the Ta-an. Each says the staff was given into his hands; each says that to him did the Lord of the Winged Death assign the leadership; each brings witnesses; each says the other speaks with two tongues. Who, then, shall decide between them? The Lord of the Winged Death has passed from us; the truth may not be learned from him.

"Yet perchance may we so learn! Calling on him, we may yet have guidance from his spirit. Is it your will that this be done?"

"In very truth! In very truth! Ask the Lord of the Winged Death!" rose the cry from the multitude, and Sa-ko, turning toward the two claimants, inquired:

"Is this also your will?"

"In very truth!" replied Tsu-ven, secure in the promise of the Chief Priest, but Nan-a-ta hesitated. Something was known to him of the skill of Sa-ko in magic, and, though, deeply religious, he trusted that the Lord of the Winged Death would not betray him, yet was he doubtful of the outcome; several times had he seen reason to mistrust the dealings of the priest clan.

But as he hesitated there rose behind him a deep growl from the tribesmen—few among them had ever questioned the power and the honesty of the priests, and he realized that his hesitation must count against him. So he replied:

"In very truth; ask of the Lord of the Winged Death!"

"It is known to you that the loser must suffer exile, outlawry; perchance even death may be his portion," resumed Sa-ko: "Light indeed this penalty for one who has rebelled against the word of the Great Father, spoken through his son, the Lord of the Winged Death!"

Nan-a-ta and Tsu-ven bowed in acknowledgment of the justice of this sentence, the one trusting to the honesty of his cause,

the other to the aid of the priest clan. Sa-ko bowed his head, clasped his hands across his bosom, and prayed aloud, the tribesmen standing with bent heads:

"Oh, Great Father, O-Ma-Ken, here stand two men, claiming each that into his hands was given the leadership of the People of the Mountain Caves. That we may adjudge between them, we pray Thee send the spirit of the Lord of the Winged Death to declare unto us the truth. Failing this, if this be not your will, we pray Thee send us a sign!" He ceased, and stood.

In all that multitude not a word was spoken, not a sound was heard, as Sa-ko waited. In the trees above, the wind rustled the branches, shaking from them the dry leaves of autumn, that came fluttering and whirling to earth; far down the hillside, in the valley, brawled and tumbled the stream, boiling over and among rocks below the Ford of Death; far overhead there floated soft white clouds, distinct against the blue, and to the ears of the waiting people was borne, faint and far, the scream of an eagle. But no man stirred.

At length the Chief Priest spoke as one acknowledging a command, saying:

"It is said!" and a sigh ran rustling through the crowd, to be instantly hushed as Sa-ko raised his head and addressed the two claimants.

"Let each bring forward an arrow!" Obedient, Nan-a-ta and Tsu-ven stepped forward, laying each an arrow on the altar, the one marked with three circles of red, insignia of Nan-a-ta, the other, Tsu-ven's, with a single yellow stripe, running lengthwise. These Sa-ko took by the flint heads, laying them point to point, the shafts in a straight line. He stepped back, raised both hands, and spoke the one word:

"Forward!"

For the space of twenty breaths nothing happened, and the tension among the people grew painful; leaning toward the altar, watching with straining eyes, they waited. Calm, immovable, with folded arms, stood the priests, their eyes also bent to the arrows, but their faces passionless as those of graven images. Nan-a-ta and Tsu-ven

gave no sign; one seeing them might have thought it a matter of no moment at all that was at stake. And still the tension grew.

At length one of the arrows—that of Nan-a-ta—stirred slightly. Instantly there came a response—the other moved as well! Through the crowd there ran a gasp of amazement, stilled at once by the strange spectacle, for, untouched by human hands—indeed, none stood within three paces of the altar—the arrows battled, rising, falling, advancing, retreating, driving fiercely at each other, reeling from the shock, dodging back and forth, maneuvering for position, feinting, striking in—and all alone on the smooth surface of the empty altar!

Forward and backward swayed the battle, the advantage now with one and now with the other, till in the end the arrow of Nan-a-ta—the red-winged one—grew weaker and weaker, retreating before the plunging assaults of the other till the edge of the altar was reached.

Here for some moments it made a stand, but at last its resistance grew fainter and fainter till it lay quiet; the arrow of Tsu-ven, victorious, triumphant, rose to its full height and hurled itself across its vanquished antagonist—and the two lay at rest, the upper twitching slightly, as a warrior might lie panting over the body of a slain adversary. From the crowd there swelled a shout:

"Tsu-ven! Tsu-ven! Death to Nan-a-ta!" Weapons were grasped, and the multitude swayed forward, to be quieted by the raised hand of Sa-ko, who stepped forward, lifted the arrows, and returned them to their owners. One voice had raised in a cry of:

"Treason! Here is trickery!" and Nan-a-ta shuddered as he recognized the tones of Tah-né the girl he loved. He feared for her; cast down by the outcome of the test, half-doubting, half-believing, he yet dreaded lest she, by her rashly impetuous defence of him, might incur the anger of the priests. Turning, he raised his hand, and the girl was silent. Nan-a-ta faced the altar again, and strove to speak, but Sa-ko silenced him.

"Men of the Ta-an," cried the Chief

Priest, "let there be no injustice. The trial by battle of the arrows might perchance mislead, one being stronger than the other through might of incantation. This further test cannot fail. Son of A-ta, the ivory staff!"

Reluctantly, yet compelled by force of public opinion, Nan-a-ta stepped forward, laying in Sa-ko's hand the ivory staff of ceremony.

"Stand you there," said Sa-ko, pointing to the right side of the altar. "Tsu-ven, you there." And he pointed to the left. Midway of the two, the handle pointing outward, he laid the staff, then prayed once more with bent head and folded hands.

"O-Ma-Ken, Great Father," he said, "by the battle of the arrows is Tsu-ven acclaimed Great Chieftain of the Ta-an. Yet since in time past wrong has been done through might of incantation, send, we pray Thee, a sure sign. Let now this staff, carved from the tooth of Do-m'-rai, the Hill That Walks, and handed down from chieftain to chieftain of the Ta-an, turn toward its rightful owner!"

Again a deep silence fell on the crowd, each waiting eagerly the outcome. For a space the ivory staff lay quiet, motionless, then quivereded slightly, the faintest possible motion, hardly to be seen even by one watching with all his eyes. It rested for a time, then once more came that little quiver, and now, slowly, slowly, the staff began to move.

First toward Nan-a-ta it turned, then hesitated, lay still, resumed its motion, and the heart of Nan-a-ta leaped within him—no! It stopped—lay still—quivered—moved again—and with steady, even, unfaltering motion drew to the left, toward Tsu-ven. At the edge of the altar it stopped, within arm's length of the son of the Lord of the Winged Death, and the Chief Priest lifted it and placed it in his hands, saying aloud:

"Tsu-ven, son to Tsan-va-men, Great Chieftain of the Ta-an are you! People of the Mountain Caves, greet now your leader!"

And from the gathering there rose a cry:

"Tsu-ven! Tsu-ven!" And the people,

men and women and children, warriors and hunters, artists and artisans, pressed forward to fall on their knees before the one appointed by the Great Father, speaking through signs.

Nan-a-ta, disheartened, dispirited, unresisting, found himself surrounded by a dozen or more of the warriors, who stripped his weapons from him and bound his hands behind his back, doing likewise for L'vu and Kan-to, Sar-no-m'rai and Sen-va. The five were hurried to a cave and placed under guard, Nan-a-ta's last backward glance showing him rank upon rank of the tribesmen pressing toward Tsu-ven, to bend before him and vow to him the allegiance that rightfully belonged to the son of A-ta.

That evening after sunset, when the last meal of the day was eaten, Tsu-ven, followed by several of his men, came to the cave where Nan-a-ta and the four friends of the Lord of the Winged Death were held prisoners. A smile on his cruel mouth, the new chieftain of the Ta-an stood before his enemy whom he had conquered by guile.

Nan-a-ta looked at him but said nothing, but L'vu, ever impulsive and unrestrained, leaped to his feet and cursed the usurper in no measured terms. "Liar," "traitor," "thief," "speaker with two tongues," these were the mildest words the indignant warrior flung at the son of the man he had loved. At length Nan-a-ta spoke, not lifting his voice, but with a snap and ring of authority that surprised even himself:

"L'vu, be silent!" Open-mouthed, amazed at the force in the tones of one he counted a boy, the burly warrior gazed a moment, then obediently seated himself without further speech. Tsu-ven addressed Nan-a-ta.

"Son of A-ta," he said, "it was in my mind to slay you and your men. But Tah-nê, who is to be my bride, has begged your lives, and they are to be spared. Yet are the tribesmen enraged against you for that you endeavored to steal from me the chieftaincy—"

"Liar!" burst out L'vu.

"Be silent!" snapped Nan-a-ta, and L'vu subsided, grumbling.

"Against you are the tribesmen angry, and difficult may it be to save you. Yet

for Tah-nê will I try, and this night shall you be placed in a canoe and sent downstream."

"Unarmed?" asked Nan-a-ta, for to send a man into the forest without weapons was a death-sentence; one might neither win food nor defend his life against savage beasts, unarmed. Tsu-ven hesitated, then answered:

"Nay, your weapons shall be given you. But not till the moment you are afloat, lest you be tempted to use them against me, thereby incurring death."

Nan-a-ta smiled scornfully; he knew well that Tsu-ven's fear was for himself rather than for his vanquished enemy—once had he seen Tsu-ven flinch in battle. But he answered naught, and presently at a sign from the new chieftain, a warrior came forward bearing the arms of the five men, and the captives were lifted to their feet and their faces set toward the river. At the top of the slope Nan-a-ta halted, saying:

"Is it permitted that I speak with Tah-nê ere I go?"

"Nay," answered Tsu-ven, "to what good? My bride is she to be."

"You lie," replied Nan-a-ta calmly and without apparent passion, and the prisoners with their guards moved onward to the river.

Presently the bank of the stream was reached, and the hands of the five were unbound; they climbed into the canoe Tsu-ven indicated, their weapons were thrown in, and a vigorous push from the foot of a warrior sent the frail craft gliding out over the water. Above, on the hillside, the glowing lights of the fires marked the caves of the Ta-an and beyond them rose the mountain, outlined against the sapphire sky. A faint mist rose from the bosom of the river, and a crescent moon shed a silver light over the scene.

As the canoe spun out over the water the men lifted their paddles, all save Kan-to. He, in the stern, was nearest the pile of weapons, and from it he seized a bow and arrow. Twisting about in his place, he fitted the nock to the string, rose to his full height, drew back the arrow to his ear, and released it. The bow-string twanged with a deep hum, and Nan-a-ta,

turning, saw a man on the bank fling wide his arms and fall.

"Tsu-ven?" he asked.

"Nay," replied Kanto, dejected, "no shooting is there in this weak light! Nevertheless—" and he stopped for another arrow, but the group of men on the bank had faded into the dusk of the forest.

Throughout all his after life the events of the four or five days immediately following were a blank—or nearly so—to Nan-a-ta. Half stunned by the sudden change of fortune, he moved like a man dazed, bewildered; eating, paddling, resting, mechanically, he gave cause for worriment to the four men with him—they wondered at times whether or not some of Tsu-ven's warriors had given him a blow on the head that might account for his strange manner. But Sar-no-m'rai reassured them.

"Twice in my days have I seen men do thus," he said. "Bethink you, cast down by treachery from the highest honor in all the tribe; outlawed and driven forth; in the same hour robbed of his betrothed; is it beyond belief that he is wrapped in a fog of amazement and grief? Let be; when comes the need for action, then will he rouse himself." And the others nodded agreement—the agreement seemed at least reasonable.

Nan-a-ta heard the speaker's words and smiled dully, with vast effort, on his men. He tried, indeed, to summon his forces and be once more himself, but the shock had been too great, and for some days the son of A-ta moved like a sleep walker. Curiously enough, when he spoke, when he referred to his misfortunes, the thing uppermost in his mind was not the loss of honor, not the loss of the girl he loved, but the taunt Tsu-ven had flung at him as the canoe glided from the shore:

"Son of A-ta, who first made the Cave That Swims on the Water?"

But as the days passed Nan-a-ta grew ever more and more like himself. The brooding silences became fewer and shorter, and at times he jested with his former adherents as the canoe passed down the Great River, gliding along through the brilliantly-colored autumn forest, stopping at intervals that the warriors might eat and sleep.

The men were all skillful hunters, and game was not lacking; also, flint and fire-stone had they, so they ate well and slept warm, despite the chill which rose by night from the river, spreading over the shores and through the woods.

At length, on the seventh day since leaving the homes of the Ta-an, there occurred an incident—two incidents, rather—which restored in full the powers and self-control of Nan-a-ta, filling him, besides, with flooding hate and a desire for revenge.

It was early morning, and the mists lay thick over the river, rolling and billowing across the water, hiding from view the bosom of the stream, and concealing utterly the farther shore. It was, however, a low-lying mist, and Nan-a-ta knew that later the streaming rays of the sun which even then was peeping over the tree-tops would break and scatter the fog; it would be a fine day.

At hand, on the gravelly point where the men had slept a fire was burning—a small cooking fire—and suspended over it on sharpened sticks were the carcasses of three wild ducks which Kan-to had shot the day before, coming on them suddenly as the canoe rounded a bend. Two had he slain before the startled birds rose from the water, the third as the flock took the air.

Sen-va was tending them, and the smell of the roasting flesh mingled pleasantly with the cool, sweet odor of early day. The others sat about, waiting, and Nan-a-ta, moved to interest, was examining his weapons. In the forest the life of a man depended from day to day on the condition of his arms, and it had struck the young man that he was not treating the others fairly in leaving to them the winning of food and their defence against the savage beasts that roamed the woods, bear and lynx and lion, jackal and hyena.

So he was going over his arms, and had found them all in admirable shape, down to the quiver of arrows. These he was now examining with care, testing the thongs that bound the flint heads to the shafts of oak or ash, looking carefully to the feathers, inspecting the heads, lest they be dulled or broken, pointless.

In going over them he came to one which

he recognized by its length—for it was a trifle longer than the others—as the one which had fought against the arrow of Tsu-ven.

Stirred by the recollection, he was about to cast the arrow from him when his eye was caught by a minute speck of some substance on the side of the head. Looking closely, Nan-a-ta saw a faint mark, as though something had been pressed into one of the corrugations of the chipped flint and a speck had remained.

Bringing the arrow near his face, and turning to get a better light, he tried to make out what it could be. It was not blood—nor flesh—nor fat—nor dirt—he smelled it, felt it, tried it with his thumbnail, then called to Sar-no-m'rai. The latter came, and Nan-a-ta showed him the speck, asking:

"What?"

Sar-no-m'rai, the silent, looked with care, he also smelling and testing. Presently he answered:

"Wax from the home of the Little People Who Carry Knives in Their Tails."

"Wax?" cried Nan-a-ta, and the other nodded.

"But how," began Nan-a-ta, and stopped. He held his quiver to the light, peering into its depths, then took the arrow from Sar-no-m'rai and stood gazing over the heads of his companions into the silvery mist above the stream. The others turned from the fire and watched their leader, but Nan-a-ta gave them no heed; rigid and still he stood, reviewing his acts for days past—how could wax of the bees have got on his arrow?

Presently he withdrew a little, seating himself on a fallen tree-trunk, concentrating his mind on the problem, for he felt instinctively that it had somewhat to do with his fortunes; an inner voice seemed to whisper that the matter was not so unimportant as it might appear. Sar-no-m'rai spoke to the others in a low tone, saying:

"Eat; presently will our chieftain feed," and they went on with the meal, eying Nan-a-ta from time to time as he sat unconscious of their presence.

Mentally, Nan-a-ta was far ahead of the

others of the Ta-an. Religious, as has been said, he yet questioned at times the power of the priest clan, doubting their ability to perform miracles, doubting their power to command the Great Father under form of prayers; it seemed to him impious to think that the Great Father would obey any man, sending good hunting or fair weather as a human being might say.

It followed from this that Nan-a-ta questioned also the magic of the priests; he felt in his heart that it was but trickery, though he had spoken no word of this belief to any among the tribesmen—to do so would have been to bring down upon himself the wrath of the priests and of the people of the tribe as well, for none other had ever doubted the words of the chief priest; all held firmly that to the priests was given the power to work miracles, that their magic was a gift from the Great Father.

So Nan-a-ta came to the problem with open mind. As he visualized again the scene of the battle of the arrows, he remembered that Sa-ko had taken the two arrows in his hands to lay them on the altar, and had lifted them again in returning them to their owners. He remembered also the manner in which the priests had taken their station, in a semicircle curving about so that the last two stood facing each other, at the sides of the flat-topped pile of stones, their arms crossed so that their hands were hidden from view.

Here a light flashed on him, growing in clearness, and he sprang to his feet with an oath, startling the four who sat about the fire. Striding to where they sat, he seized one of the ducks in his strong hands, wrenched off a leg, and devoured it greedily, going afterward to the river to drink. He called aloud:

"L'vu, with me! The others remain till we return!" And without looking to see if he was followed, plunged into the forest.

The day before Nan-a-ta had noted subconsciously, as does the trained hunter, a game-trail coming down to the river a few thousand paces up-stream from where the camp lay, and toward this he and L'vu marched through the underbrush, the latter puzzled, wondering.

Reaching the place, they approached with caution, the leader motioning to the older man for silence. They ensconced themselves in the underbrush, waiting, and for more than an hour they lay silent, motionless, while troop after troop of beasts passed their ambush, going down to the river to drink.

Bison, wild cattle, wild sheep went by; a herd of deer also, and the huge, ungainly, but lightning-swift beast that wears a horn on his nose.

These all Nan-a-ta let go by, till at length his trained ear caught the sound of a band of wild horses. Rising softly to his feet, Nan-a-ta fitted an arrow to his string, peering through a little opening in the brush. As the leader of the band, a magnificent stallion, drew near, Nan-a-ta slowly pulled back the arrow and let fly at not more than two yards' distance.

The bow hummed, and the missile buried itself to the feathers in the body of the stallion, directly behind the shoulder; with a gasping snort the animal plunged forward and started to run, the mares whirling, jostling in their fright and confusion, and at length dashing backward in the direction from which they had come.

Nan-a-ta and L'vu remained stock-still, knowing that a beast, mortally wounded, will often, if pursued, lead his slayer a long chase, but if not followed will give up within a short time. Sure enough, the stallion ran but a few yards, then stopped and stood, feet braced wide apart, the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils.

Soon he wavered, toppled, and fell crashing to the ground, and the hunters came forth from ambush and started toward him. Nan-a-ta, intent on his great idea, cut a bundle of hair from the beast's tail, whereas L'vu, more practical, hewed off a hind-quarter, and with their burdens the two returned to camp. The meat was roasted before the fire, Nan-a-ta busying himself meanwhile with some affairs of his own, and before the flesh was cooked for carrying he stepped over to where the others sat.

"Look!" he cried, "you have seen the magic of the priests; see now the magic of Nan-a-ta!"

He cast an arrow on the ground some paces from the group, stepped back and folded his arms.

"Watch close!" he said. "The arrow comes to my call!"

The others looked at him in amazement, thinking his troubles had turned his brain—L'vu had told them of the strange hunting, nothing taken from the horse save the tail. But Nan-a-ta directed their attention to the arrow, which lay still on the gravel. Motionless it lay, till he spoke to it, saying:

"To me, arrow! Come to your master's hand!"

The arrow quivered slightly, the head rose from the ground, and slowly, jerkily, but none the less surely the shaft crept over the gravel toward Nan-a-ta! Aghast, astounded, the four men leaped up, breathing words of astonishment—even Sar-no-m'r'ai, most silent of the tribesmen, gave vent to a whispered oath—and they bent forward, looking eagerly, watching close.

"Arrow, lie still!" commanded Nan-a-ta, and instantly the arrow ceased its motion.

"To me!" he called, and again began the slow, jerky progress.

Terrorized, the four men looked from their leader to the shaft and back. Nan-a-ta laughed, stepped forward, lifted his hand, and the arrow leaped into the air, poising clear of the ground—it was too much—with cries of fear and reverence the four fell on their knees and bowed before Nan-a-ta.

"Great Chieftain!" they cried. "Great sorcerer, spare us! We faithful, implore thy mercy!"

Nan-a-ta laughed.

"Nay," said he, "here is no magic. Look!" And stepping close he held out the arrow with the strand of horse-hair fastened to the head.

"See now the magic of the priests! Behold what you have feared! It is but trickery, to be done by children!"

Reassured, but trembling still, the men gathered, looking, handling, and exclaiming in wonder. Then spoke Nan-a-ta, raising his right hand:

"Hear me!" he cried. "Hear me, L'vu

and Sar-no-m'rai, Kan-to and Sen-va! By the Great Father do I swear that one day will I return to the Ta-an, driving forth the one who has stolen my place, out-magicking the magic of priest and chieftain, to break the false power of the priestly clan and take vengeance on those who have driven me out! The Great Father sparing my life, this will I do, taking triple vengeance on them who have stolen from me my beloved! It is sworn!"

Then Sar-no-m'rai stepped forward.

"Great chieftain," he said, "to us did T'san-va-men, dying, commend you, bidding us be faithful even to death. Out of our love for the friend of our boyhood, our adored chieftain, this would we do. Yet more for him who reads the magic of the priestly clan! To death and after are we yours; command us, son of A-ta. I speak for all."

Overcome, Nan-a-ta buried his face in his hands. Suddenly there came a shout, far up the river. All looked. A canoe was rounding a bend, in it three figures. The five gazed eagerly, grasping their weapons —was it friend or foe that came? Came another shout, and Sar-no-m'rai cried:

"Tah-né!" And the five men set off up-stream, running along the shore, while the canoe swung in to meet them.

## CHAPTER IV.

### TAH-NÉ'S STORY.

**S**OON Tah-né and her lover were in each other's arms, while the four old men who had followed Nan-a-ta clasped hands with the two younger—Ban and Su, close friends of the son of A-ta—who had brought the girl. Then presently the first joy of the meeting with his betrothed over, Nan-a-ta also turned to greet his friends, demanding explanations.

Question and answer flew thick, till finally, confused, Nan-a-ta called for silence, and led the little band again to the fire, where all sat and the newcomers ate of the horse-flesh L'vu had brought.

Their hunger satisfied, Nan-a-ta asked again for the tale of events, calling upon Tah-né to tell the story. She, sitting close

to him, dropped her face for a moment in her hands, overcome by the horrors she had seen. Then looking up, she smiled bravely and said:

"Oh, my love, never had I thought to rest my eyes once more on your face! I had thought you were lost to me forever and ay! Brother have I seen slaying brother, and son, father! And Tsu-ven!" She shuddered, and the eyes of Nan-a-ta narrowed as he asked:

"Yes? And Tsu-ven?"

"It matters naught!" answered the girl brightly, smiling with evident effort. "He has not harmed me. Now, listen!" And she told her tale, Ban and Su nodding from time to time as in confirmation of things they also had seen and heard.

Tsu-ven had counted well on the effect of surprise. When Nan-a-ta, dazed and stunned by the suddenness of events, had suffered himself to be disarmed and led away, the tribesmen had offered no resistance, and Sa-ko, the chief priest, had performed the ceremony of induction whereby Tsu-ven became great chieftain of the Ta-an.

But many of the tribesmen distrusted Tsu-ven deeply. It was not known that he was secretly a coward; in battle he bore himself well, and in the hunt, nor had any save Nan-a-ta and Sa-ko ever seen him flinch from danger.

Yet there was in the tribe an undercurrent of doubt; Tsu-ven was known to be cruel, and not as the Ta-an were, of necessity, but because the sight of suffering was pleasant to him. Also, it was known that he spoke with two tongues, and his words could not be depended on. Further, he was pleasure-loving and selfish, so that many of the People of the Mountain Caves questioned his worth as chieftain, nor could aught save the signs vouchsafed upon the altar have made them accept him.

Foremost among the doubters were Ban and Su, and a third friend of Nan-a-ta's, by name Men-ah. These three had gone about among the tribesmen, spreading sedition and stirring up the Ta-an to resistance, and not a few had followed their lead, taking up arms against the new chieftain. The revolt had spread like fire, and

within three days after Nan-a-ta's departure the rebels had fought a pitched battle with the warriors of Tsu-ven.

From the hillside above the women and children of the tribe, with those warriors who remained neutral, had watched the civil strife. The valley had resounded with the clash of arms, the groans and shrieks of the wounded, the cries of struggling men. Red ran the stream, and the yellowing grass under foot was trampled into a horrible red mire, where men slipped and fell, wounded or dying. In the river bobbed in ghastly fashion the bodies of the slain, and over all the once peaceful valley swooped and dipped and poised the vultures, drawn on swift wings to the feast that waited them.

At the last the warriors of Tsu-ven were victorious, and in the battle fell Men-ah, slain by a lance-thrust. Ban and Su, seeing the day lost, made good their escape, not that death held any terrors for them, but that they planned to return again and yet again till Tsu-ven should be overthrown, for both hated him bitterly for what he had done to Nan-a-ta.

The battle ended, Tsu-ven had gone straight to Tah-né, whom he had loved for years, though this was news to Nan-a-ta, the girl having told him naught of Tsu-ven's advances. Knowing it now for the first, Nan-a-ta ground his teeth and clenched his fists; one thing more, one other offense added to the score he held against Tsu-ven! And then the exile dropped his head in his hands and groaned; what sort of leader was he, to permit himself to be led peaceably away, like a victim to the altar, while his friends fought his battles!

Tah-né, divining the cause of his grief, laid her hand on his arm, and with the touch came the recollection of the oath he had that morning sworn. He raised his head and spoke briefly:

"And then?" and the girl went on.

Flushed, triumphant, reeking from the battle, Tsu-ven had come to her, demanding that she accept him, that she be his wife, that she take her place as the mate of the great chieftain. But Tah-né had refused. To begin, she loved Nan-a-ta, nor

was she one to chop and change with the winds of fortune. Then, also, though a warrior's daughter and no coward, this blood with which Tsu-ven was spattered was the blood of her friends, her relatives. Could she forget that?

So she drove him away with bitter words, with scorn and hatred. Raging, Tsu-ven had ordered his warriors to seize her and hold her prisoner; even he did not dare openly to take her to his cave, she resisting; but he meant to guard her well, and when, later, all opposition was crushed and none dared dispute his word, then should she be his, by force if not with good-will.

So she had been carried from her home and placed in a small cave, where one of Tsu-ven's warriors watched her night and day, the guard changing at sunrise and at sunset.

Thus for the space of three days Tah-né remained a prisoner, Tsu-ven coming each day to urge his suit, sending the guard away when he was there. But he met only rebuffs, scorn, hatred, and fierce words, till at last he said:

"No more do I come; prisoner shall you remain, and soon, when that my rule is firmly fixed, to my cave shall you be carried, whether with your will or without."

Tah-né shuddered at the prospect, but held firm, making up her mind, as Tsu-ven left, to try what might be done to effect her escape through working on the guard. Therefore, that night, she undertook to persuade this guard, Ku-sen by name, to connive at her flight.

All the blandishments at her command were tried; argument, prayers, entreaties, promises, but to no avail. Ku-sen was by no means insensible to the attractions of a beautiful young girl, but he dwelt in fear of Tsu-ven; to all her words he replied only by a shake of the head and the answer:

"My life is forfeit to the great chieftain should you escape," nor could Tah-né move him.

She went so far as to seat herself beside him, her arm about his neck, her cheek pressed close to his, her warm breath in his ear as she begged; she wept; she asked

him to picture to himself his own grief were his betrothal torn from him by violence to be the unwilling bride of another, and though Ku-sen shook from head to foot and ground his teeth with rage at the thought, yet was his fear too great, his awe of the chieftain too deep for him to yield.

At length Tah-né desisted and lay down to rest, turning over and over in her mind plan after plan, rejecting all, and at length falling asleep, her last memory the glowing fire illuminating with its ruddy glare the huge bulk of Ku-sen as he sat watching.

When she awoke Ku-sen was gone; it was morning, and the other guard had taken his place. Tah-né knew well it would be useless to try persuasion on this man; brutal, ignorant, of low intelligence, his chief characteristics were his doglike devotion to Tsu-ven and his hatred of Nan-a-ta—consequently, of her.

Indeed, he had taunted her with her position and with the outlawry of her lover till Tah-né had been forced to keep silence lest she anger him beyond endurance; death was naught to her—in very truth, more welcome would it be than the arms of Tsu-ven—yet it lay ever in her mind that she might perchance aid Nan-a-ta.

Therefore she spoke naught during the day, eating in silence and giving all her mind to working out a plan for escape. At length she hit on one; a device to mislead Ku-sen for the few moments necessary for her flight, and, all details perfected, she waited when the guard should be changed.

The plan was a good one. The cave where Tah-né was held lay some distance down-stream beyond the other caves of the Ta-an; none of the tribesmen would be within call, and it was in the girl's mind to feign illness, daubing her face with ashes from the fire mixed with water from her drinking-jar to give a haggard look, then crying to Ku-sen for aid, and by force of acting convincing him that she was dying.

Then, while he sought some woman of the tribe, would Tah-né flee from the cave, making her way down the river, seeking Nan-a-ta. A perilous search, in truth, for the forests swarmed with savage beasts, and Tah-né knew well that she would be followed.

Weaponless, dangers would beset her on every side, yet to these she gave no thought. Trained in wood-craft beyond any other of the women of the tribe, beloved pupil of Sar-no-m'rai and Kan-to, the most skilful hunters of the Ta-an, taught also by the Lord of the Winged Death, she felt confident that she could elude pursuit and wild beasts till she could overtake her lover.

But as it chanced she had no need to practise the deceit she had planned. When Ku-sen came, in the evening, she sat by him talking for some time. It was good, she said, to have near her one with whom she could converse; the other guard was a savage, a wild beast.

Ku-sen, flattered, allowed her to remain by the fire, she saying that the chill of autumn had bitten deep into her bones—her real reason, of course, to seek a chance at the ashes she desired. Chatting, Tah-né remarked that it was no slight matter for Ku-sen to walk to her prison-cave after dusk had fallen, when the hunting beasts and the devils of the night were abroad.

"Nay," replied Ku-sen, "by the river come I, in a cave that swims on the water." And Tah-né bent her head to hide the gleam of satisfaction in her eyes. A canoe! This was better than she had hoped.

So, for a time, they talked pleasantly enough, Ku-sen laying aside his weapons for greater ease, and presenting to Tah-né a choice tidbit from a wild sheep he had that day killed. This they roasted over the fire, sharing it. Outside lay the blackness of night, little patch of deep-blue sky, thick sown with stars, showing through the mouth of the cave. The air was crisp and cool, and from time to time leaves, blown from the trees, drifted into the cave, swirling and twisting till they came to rest on the hard stone floor.

So passed the evening, and the middle hour of the night drew near. Tah-né, a handful of ashes tight clasped, rose to retire to her couch of skins when, chancing to cast a look toward the cave-mouth, she stopped suddenly, her gaze fixed by a strange glow in the sky. The cave, unlike most of the caves of the Ta-an, fronted almost due north—indeed, the one fixed star, the guiding light of the night, the

star that never sets, could be seen from where she stood.

At the girl's exclamation Ku-sen leaped to his feet and whirled around, then he, too, stood frozen in wonder, for the whole northern sky glowed with light. As the two watched, the light grew and spread, vast streamers of orange and gold and crimson, purple and green and yellow, flaming upward toward the zenith, rising and falling and rising again.

Crossing these streamers were waves of gorgeous colors that swept up and down, undulating as the streamers rose and fell, till the arch of the sky from horizon to zenith, from west to east, was one vast quivering glow of light.

Awe-struck, the two stood, the strange, unearthly light flooding the cave, and casting its weird illumination over their forms. Gasping, shaking, Ku-sen muttered:

"An omen!" and he fell on his knees in prayer, his hands uplifted toward the sky.

But Tahné recovered herself more quickly. Often and often had she heard the Lord of the Winged Death speak of these strange lights, for he, born in the high mountains far toward the rising sun, had seen them many a time in childhood and youth. Therefore she knew that they portended no harm; none might explain them, none knew the reason for them, but T'san-va-men had assured her that no evil followed in their train, and Tahné, though awe-struck at the wondrous sight, had no fear. But aside from the Lord of the Winged Death, and his four companions, now with Nan-a-ta, none living of the Ta-an had seen the marvel, so it was not strange that Ku-sen knelt in terror.

Seeing her guard thus paralyzed with fear, Tahné caught up his weapons—at least ax and bow and arrows—and fled from the cave, making her way swiftly down the slope to where she supposed the canoe was beached.

Her guess proved correct; a ten-man canoe with two paddles lay along the shore, and she pushed and heaved, straining to get it afloat, the strange light in the sky serving to show the scene. Hastily, furiously, she labored, not knowing what instant Ku-sen,

recovering from his terror, might come plunging down the hillside to her capture.

The canoe, wedged in the mud of the bank, resisted, and Tahné sobbed in fear as she tugged to free it. The strange light waxed and waned, now duller, now brighter, as the girl struggled, praying:

"Oh, Great Father, O-Ma-Ken, send aid! Let me not be too late!" she begged, and, throwing her whole strength against it, she felt the canoe stir.

Again—again—and now it was afloat, the water bearing up the forward end. But at that moment, when safety seemed at hand, when another minute would have seen her borne swiftly down stream, Tahné heard a noise behind her, and, turning quickly, she saw Ku-sen running down the hill, following along the narrow trail that wound through the brush.

In another moment he would be upon her, and with a sob the girl caught up the flint-headed ax from the bottom of the canoe, determined that she would fight to the death rather than return to be the bride of Tsu-ven.

Seeing the ax in her hand, Ku-sen checked in mid-stride, looked about, and seized a branch of a tree that lay on the ground. Tahné realized his purpose; the branch would serve to ward off an ax blow, and his greater strength would suffice for her capture.

Desperate, unnerved at the prospect, Tahné yet stood firm, waiting. But even as Ku-sen stooped something in the brush moved—the bushes parted—a huge, tawny form launched itself through the air, and Ku-sen, caught unawares, was hurled to the ground. Over him, head raised, mane bristling, tail lashing to and fro, stood a magnificent lion, holding the stunned man to the earth with one great paw.

"Snorr-m'r'ai-no!" gasped Tahné. "The fear that walks the night!" And in terror she turned again to the canoe, heaving more desperately than before. It slid into the water, and with a spring she was aboard; she seized the paddle, and with a few quick strokes drove the craft toward the middle of the river.

Once she looked back, to see the lion still standing above his unconscious prey, still

pressing the doomed man down. Shuddering, Tah-né sank to the bottom of the canoe and covered her face with her hands, and as the swift current carried her down the light faded from the sky, all grew dark with the blackness of the midnight forest, and from the bank she had just left there rose and swelled and resounded through the night the deep, earth-shaking roar of the savage beast, the triumphant roar of the lion that has made his kill.

All through the rest of the night Tah-né huddled in the bottom of the canoe, swept downward by the stream, her hands pressed to her ears in vain effort to shut out that terrible roar—she had not hated Ku-sen; rather had she liked him, so far as one might like an enemy, and before her eyes still swam that awful picture.

But when morning came she roused herself, took the paddle, and began to drive the canoe, pondering the while as to the next step that lay before her. To find Nan-a-ta—that was the problem. But how? Even had he not left the river, even was he still journeying down the current, in all likelihood she could not overtake him by day, and at night she might easily pass his camp in the darkness.

While turning this over in her mind she was startled by a faint shout, a hail from the farther shore, and looked about, to see two men standing on the bank making the peace sign.

She turned the prow of the canoe toward them, and as she drew nearer she knew them for Ban and Su, friends to Nan-a-ta, and leaders with Men-ah, of the insurrection against Tsu-ven.

She ran the canoe quickly to where they stood, and explanations followed. Ban and Su had escaped the rout by swimming, and were on their way to seek Nan-a-ta; they had slain a bison and had food, and when Tah-né had eaten the three climbed into the canoe and continued the search.

How the search ended has been told, and as Nan-a-ta heard what had been done among the Ta-an in his absence he clasped Tah-né once more in his arms, grasping again the hands of Ban and Su, telling them of the vow he had sworn. And they, learning that the chieftain whom they loved

meant in very truth to return once more to the Ta-an, to take his rightful place, knelt before him and renewed their vows of allegiance to the son of A-ta.

"Rouse we now," said Nan-a-ta. "Ere long will the warriors of Tsu-ven be on our track. The canoe of Tah-né is the better; take we that, destroying the other."

And the old canoe was quickly filled with leaves and twigs and sticks, set afire, and abandoned to the river, while the eight fugitives set out down-stream, driving their craft with all four of the paddles from the two canoes.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE RETURN.

FOR some days the fugitives hastened down the river, striving to elude the pursuit they knew would follow when Tsu-ven discovered the flight of Tah-né. Nan-a-ta urged his paddlers ever to greater haste, partly that they might not be overtaken, partly that a home might be found ere winter caught them.

As they proceeded they found the water growing ever blacker and blacker with the decaying leaves and wood swept down from the hills in the lesser streams, till before long the river, crystal-clear in summer, had become so dark that the blades of the paddles could not be seen to their full depth, and the water, lifted in the hand to drink, showed deeply tinged with yellow.

By this token, and by other signs, Nan-a-ta knew that the long cold was drawing nigh, and he feared that the snow would find them houseless.

After three days of travel the canoe came to the junction of the great river and the lesser river, where the two flowed together to form one mighty stream, and the leader felt that safety was at hand. No sign had been seen or heard of the warriors of Tsu-ven, despite the anxious search of the sky each morning and evening for some betraying wisp of smoke from a cooking fire.

This, to be sure, was no certain proof, for Nan-a-ta's men were crafty enough to choose dry wood that burned without smoke for their own small fire, and it might

be that Tsu-ven's would do likewise. Still, it was some slight reassurance, and Nan-a-ta hoped that he had outsped the chase. Furthermore, he was far beyond the most distant point where ranged the Little Hairy Men, and within a day's journey, overland, of the great water.

Here the party left the canoe, hiding it cleverly among the underbrush a hundred paces from the river, that it might not be seen of any chance passer, and plunged into the forest, carefully blinding their trail at the spot where they left the stream.

South and west they traveled, reaching at length a spot of high ground, where Nan-a-ta decided to build shelters for the long cold. That there was still higher ground not very far away he knew from the fact that a spring bubbled up from the earth on the very peak of the knoll he had chosen, but this was high enough, and the spring would furnish water.

Game was plentiful, for both food and clothing, for signs were common of deer, bear, wildcat, wolf, fox, and lynx, as well as lesser animals, such as otter, weasel, and beaver.

The little knoll, some hundred paces across, was, like all that country, heavily wooded, and the first task of Nan-a-ta and his men was to clear away the trees and underbrush that an enclosure might be built. With ax and with fire was the ground cleared, Tah-né working side by side with the men, taking her full share of the labor, for though lightly muscled—by comparison with a warrior—she yet owned a store of nervous energy which made up for the lack.

At length the trees were down and trimmed, and Nan-a-ta then told off Sar-no-m'r'ai, most skilful of all the trackers of the Ta-an, with Kan-to, also a skilled hunter, and Ban, to bring in food. He himself, with L'vu, Sen-va, Su, and Tah-né, took up the task of cutting the felled trees to length and erecting a stockade about the crest of the knoll, weaving branches and withes in and out among the trunks to form a fence close and strong and high enough to protect those within against the assaults of beasts of prey.

While this was going on the hunters were

bringing in game in quantities, chiefly deer and bear, but also some beasts that were useful for their fur, though, to be sure, this was not the season for the finest fur; that would come later, during the fiercest of the cold. Still, they would serve.

The flesh of the edible beasts was dried over the fire, and the various skins were dressed and stretched over frames of poles thrust into the ground and bound together at the top; some, indeed, were reserved for garments and for wrappings in which to sleep. Also, the hunters brought in stores of berries and tuberous roots, the former being dried over the fires, the latter buried deep in the ground that they might not freeze. Great piles of wood for the fires were gathered, too, being stored within the enclosure, against the stockade.

Finally all was complete, and Nan-a-ta surveyed the result with satisfaction, saying to Sar-no-m'r'ai:

"It is done; let come the long cold, we are safe."

Sar-no-m'r'ai, ever sparing of words, grunted in reply, pointing upward. Nan-a-ta followed the direction of the older man's finger, and nodded.

"You would say it is none too soon?" and Sar-no-m'r'ai grunted again, for in truth the air was chill and the sky covered with dull, gray clouds. Next morning, when the men crept from their huts of poles and skins, the ground was white with snow, and the great flakes were drifting softly, silently downward in thick clouds that hid the forest from view—scarcely, indeed, could one see across the enclosure.

All that day it snowed, that night, and the following day, and when at last the sun shone bright again the snow lay to the height of a man's waist within the stockade. Sar-no-m'r'ai, catching the eye of Nan-a-ta, grunted inquiringly, and the leader answered the thought:

"None too soon, in very truth!" he said. "Yet are we secure!" And the words were punctuated by the rending crash of a near-by limb, borne down under its weight of snow, tearing from the parent oak.

Food and clothing and warmth assured, Nan-a-ta turned to the thought that was ever present in his mind; to solve the mys-

teries of the priestly magic. His was no common mind; less given to imagination and more to reason than most of the tribesmen, he was less inclined to accept the priestly magic as the work of some super-human power. To him it was the work of man's hands, and to himself he said:

"What one can do, that can also another!" And he set about to prove his words, encouraged thereto by his proof that the battle of the arrows was but trickery.

Then followed long days of labor, of experiment; for days at a time Nan-a-ta moved in a maze of abstraction, thinking, studying, planning; scarce taking time for food or sleep when hot on the trail of some mystery. The others ate and slept, talked, gamed, hunted, but Nan-a-ta lived preoccupied. At times he would come out from his studies to relax, and then the others marveled at the sprightliness of his manner. He might spend a day hunting, when he would outrun even Ban and Su in pursuit of a wounded beast; he might elect to run down a deer in the deep snow; he might join in the games about the fire, when he cast from him the mantle of dignity of the chieftain to send the others into gales of laughter.

Once, presuming on this relaxation of Nan-a-ta's, Su ventured to overstep the bounds of respect. Instantly, like a flash of lightning, the antics of the clown vanished, and the stern blaze of anger from the eyes of Nan-a-ta brought the offender, cowering, to the chieftain's feet.

Even more dangerous sports did Nan-a-ta indulge in; for once, coming out of a four days' study, he seized lance and dagger, and with these weapons alone hunted down and slew a lynx. He was wounded, but not seriously, and on Kan-to's remonstrating that the life of the chief was too valuable to be risked thus, Nan-a-ta laughed, replying:

"Naught can harm me; I bear a charmed life." And Kan-to, doubtful, more than half believed the words.

So passed the winter, and the following summer as well, Nan-a-ta occasionally, as he solved some new problem, calling his

followers to witness the marvel, which he invariably showed in the manner of the priests, with all possible pomp and circumstance tending to rouse awe and wonder; afterward he displayed the workings of the miracle, explaining the matter in which it was wrought.

Thus he repeated the miracle of the battle of arrows and the moving wand, using fine strands of horse-hair to cause the motion. Also, he discovered the secret of the Foot of the Wolf, whereby he could at will produce the lightnings that had so terrified Tsu-ven on his visit to the chief priest.

The miracle of the boiling rock was his, too, the stone which, thrown into the water, causes fierce boiling.\* By covering his palm with a thin layer of ashes from the fire, Nan-a-ta was able to astonish the others by displaying the famous immunity to fire which the priests boasted, for he carried in his hand, unharmed, burning coals and hot stones, brushing off the ashes as he cast down the thing carried, that his skin might show clear and clean.

And when the summer came Nan-a-ta showed also the miracle of the serpent staff, having learned from his father how to press on the neck of a reptile so that the snake would become stiff and rigid as a stick.

These and many other wonders did he display, not showing them as miracles, but always with derision, as tricks to amuse the children of the tribe, asking ever of his men if they could believe now in the magic power of the priest clan.

One curious result grew from the studies of Nan-a-ta, for L'vu, slowest of wit of the little band, was first shocked at the sacrilege, the blasphemy of treating so lightly these magic powers, and in the end, for all the disclaimers of Nan-a-ta, came to regard the leader as somewhat more than human, revering him as one sent by the Great Father.

And for all Nan-a-ta could say, for all his remonstrances, L'vu continued to give him, if not the worship accorded a god, at least a veneration beyond that granted to

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—\* This was undoubtedly limestone, which, burned to lime, evolves great heat on shaking in water.

mortals. In the end Nan-a-ta was forced to accept this attitude, for neither remonstrance, abuse, nor laughter had the slightest effect on the elder.

And not only did Nan-a-ta discover the secrets of the thaumaturgists of the Ta-an, but he invented still other magic, holding this, however, in reserve till that time should come when he could make telling use of it before the tribe, not showing it even to his own men, not even to Tah-né.

When once more autumn had come around, and the crisping leaves were blown from the trees, Nan-a-ta felt himself strong enough to make an effort to regain the place of honor from which Tsu-ven had cast him out. He therefore called to him Ban and Sar-no-m'rai, the strong young fighter and the councillor grown gray in years and wisdom. To them he spoke at length, saying:

"In my mind it lies that the time is ripe for our return to the homes of the Ta-an. Go you, then, taking the Cave that Swims On the Water, and making all haste; more slowly will we others follow, making for ourselves another canoe. Your task will it be to spy ahead, learning what may be of the rule of Tsu-ven, whether he is loved by the people or hated, whether he is a wise and just chieftain, or weak and false. My thought is it that the latter will prove true, yet is this for you to learn."

"Speak with the warriors of the Ta-an, going secretly, to learn if the son of A-ta is favored; learn by whom is Tsu-ven upheld, and who will fight under our banner. Be crafty and cautious, gaining for us what aid may be."

"Make all speed, keeping watch for us on the river on your return. And may the Great Father aid and watch over you! It is said! Farewell!"

"It is said! Farewell!" replied the messengers, and turned away. Weapons and food they took, then, leaving the stockade, plunged into the forest, and vanished as a stone dropped into deep water.

Nan-a-ta summoned the rest of his people and told them what he had done, bidding them prepare for departure. Skins and clothing were bundled up, some small stores of food were taken—not much, how-

ever, since, traveling slowly, they could live off the country—and weapons were put in good order.

Then they made their way through the forest to the river, halted for the space of two days while a tree was felled and hollowed and shaped to make a canoe, and paddles were cut, and set out, journeying by easy stages, for the home they had left a year before.

In bow and stern L'vu and Su swung their paddles, then Kan-to and Sen-va also, while in the waist of the craft Nan-a-ta and Tah-né rested, talking much in low voices as the canoe forged steadily upstream.

To the girl Nan-a-ta confided his plans, so far as any could be laid, explaining with care how he hoped to work on the minds of the tribesmen to overthrow Tsu-ven, the usurper, and his friends, the treacherous priests. Fighting would there be, he said, yet he hoped but little, for it was no joy to him to slay his own tribesmen, even though they had taken arms against him, their rightful chieftain.

No; by magic did he hope to win the contest, and to that end had he worked and studied and wrought through a full round of the seasons. Well, the event lay in the hands of the Great Father; a man could but do what in him lay!

In after years did Nan-a-ta and Tah-né count those the happiest days of their lives, those warm and balmy days of autumn when, borne gently and easily upon the bosom of the mighty river, they talked over their purposes and hopes and plans. On either hand the great forest rolled in unending panorama of rich colors, unfolding new vistas of loveliness as the canoe rounded bend after bend.

Had it not been for the vow to his mother, Nan-a-ta would have been inducted into the artist rather than the warrior clan, for there dwelt within him a soul sensitive to all beauty, and the strain of the past year relaxed and his mind was at ease as he reveled in the exquisiteness of the journey, all things combining to give the rest he needed ere taking up the struggle for supremacy in the tribe.

He had no delusions in the matter; well

he knew that a fierce and bitter struggle lay before him, but for the time he put the thought away and gave himself over to sheer enjoyment—a much-needed rest, in very truth, for he was thin and haggard from the intense concentration of the months past.

Indeed, one who had known him a year before would scarce have recognized him now. Then, though lean and wiry as became a warrior, he had been round of cheek and unlined of face, a youth of pleasant features and ready smile. Now, on the other hand, his cheeks had sunk—though he was not gaunt—and the months of labor, of forcing his mind to unremitting study, had set his mouth in a firm line and graven deep furrows on cheeks and brow.

Also, his eyes glowed with a fiercer light, and he had a trick of fixing them, the lids slightly narrowed, with unwinking gaze on whomever he spoke with. This steady, unwinking stare was most disconcerting; even L'vu and the others, all men known for their courage among a brave people, could not endure this fixed look, but after a few seconds were forced to turn their eyes away. It was not, indeed, lack of courage that compelled them; rather was it that they knew themselves in the presence of a stronger will.

Presently the voyagers reached the junction of the rivers, and bore to the left, going steadily onward, though traveling slowly and camping much along the shore. At length, on the twenty-eighth day of their journey, they caught sight of a canoe, manned by a single paddler, coming swiftly down-stream.

They took up their arms, holding themselves in readiness for a possible attack, but as the craft came nearer they saw it was Ban, alone.

Fear laid a cold hand on the heart of Nan-a-ta, and as soon as the canoes drew close he called for news of Sar-no-m'rai. Ban laid his paddle athwart the canoe and doubled over in uncontrollable mirth. Then, regaining words:

"Great Chieftain," he said, "in very truth, none is there like to that craftiest of the crafty! Into the very cave of Tsu-

ven has he gone, saying he hates you and wishes you evil—Tsu-ven, believing, has received him with words of kindness, making him chief of his councillors."

"And you?" asked Nan-a-ta.

"Nay, Great Chieftain, Tsu-ven knows me not. Without the homes of the Ta-an did I make my camp, Sar-no-m'rai from time to time bringing word of what went on within. And, Great Chieftain"—here Ban broke off to chuckle grimly—"since the hour when Sar-no-m'rai set foot in the cave of Tsu-ven twelve of the warriors of the usurper have disappeared!"

"Slain?"

"Nay, that is not known to me. Naught said Sar-no-m'rai save that they had disappeared!"

Nan-a-ta chuckled; well could he picture the fierce old warrior stealing on silent foot behind some man of Tsu-ven's and silencing him with swift dagger-stroke or blow of that heavy ax of flint, afterward weighting the body with stones and rolling it into the river or hiding it in the undergrowth.

"But of the rest?" inquired Nan-a-ta. "Is Tsu-ven beloved of the Ta-an? Do the tribesmen hold with his rule?"

"Beloved?" echoed Ban. "Hated, rather! By fear alone does he hold his place. Living but for pleasure, not in the slightest regards he the welfare of the tribe, but even"—and Ban's voice dropped to a hushed and horror-stricken whisper—"on the Great Altar are men and women offered in sacrifice! By order of Sa-ko and by the will of Tsu-ven is this done!"

Nan-a-ta dropped his face in his hands and groaned, then looking up, raised his hands toward the sky.

"Great Father, O-Ma-Ken," he prayed aloud, "grant me, I pray, to avenge this wrong, to right this evil, yea, though my life be forfeit in the doing!" Then turning once more to Ban, he asked:

"What of the warriors? Will they join with me? Or rules Tsu-ven with too stern a hand?"

"Great Chieftain," was the reply, "Sar-no-m'rai, most trusted of the councillors of Tsu-ven"—Ban chuckled once more, and in spite of himself Nan-a-ta smiled grimly—"Sar-no-m'rai goes among the

men of the Ta-an, seeking to influence them toward you—nor, in very truth, is much needed! Already ten tens and more have slipped secretly from the camp, full-armed, to seek your leadership, knowing that you draw near. By ones and twos and threes they come, foremost among them Ken-thu, well known to you."

Nan-a-ta nodded, and Ban went on:

"Ken-thu seeks vengeance on the usurper, for that A-ai, betrothed to him, was torn from him to be, unwilling, the bride of Tsu-ven. Full of rage is Ken-thu, yet daring not to match his strength with that of Tsu-ven."

Nan-a-ta's mouth set in a hard, grim line as he answered:

"Vengeance shall Ken-thu have! Here make we camp, waiting the warriors who come to join us; they come, then march we against Tsu-ven, that this evil may be undone!"

The canoes turned to the shore, and on a broad and treeless meadow was the camp made, a little, smokeless cooking fire being built. There Nan-a-ta and his men settled themselves to wait the coming of the warriors by whose aid Tsu-ven should be overthrown.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MASTER OF MAGIC.

FOR several days Nan-a-ta remained camped in the meadow, while the warriors, rebels against Tsu-ven, drifted in. Each one as he arrived went direct to Nan-a-ta's fire, bowing before the chieftain and craving pardon for past offenses; renewing, also, his vows of allegiance or making them for the first time. Each man, too—or almost every one—brought news of some outrage of Tsu-ven's, till Nan-a-ta's blood boiled within him with rage.

Maidens seized, food stolen, warriors slaughtered, insults sown broadcast—these made up the tale of the past year, and a dozen times a day Nan-a-ta renewed his oath of vengeance. Sa-ko and the other priests, it seemed, were partakers of Tsu-ven's crimes, lording it over the tribesmen,

condemning to death all who opposed them, and carrying out the sentence on the Great Altar, till the stones of that pile reeked with the blood of the tribesmen.

Among the warriors came Ken-thu, his mouth set grimly, his eyes burning deep in his head with the fever of rage which had possessed his soul since the loss of A-ai. Him Nan-a-ta greeted with especial warmth, holding long talks with the young warrior, and in the end appointing him his chief lieutenant, for Ken-thu was crafty as well as brave.

At length the tale was made up, and Nan-a-ta, marshalling his forces on the flat, counted eleven tens and two of warriors and hunters, besides some dozen or score of artists and artisans, men less skilled with weapons than the others, but no whit behind them in courage. Nan-a-ta spoke briefly to his forces.

"Men of the Ta-an," he said, "to-day we march to avenge the wrongs of the People of the Mountain Caves. By night will we attack, falling on the warriors of Tsu-ven. Strike boldly, even to the death, sparing none who stand against us, yet slay none who yield. Tsu-ven himself shall you not slay; alive must he be taken, that his death follow duly and in order upon fair trial at the Rock of Council. When the sun is over the tree-tops we march. It is said!"

The men scattered, to rest and eat in preparation for the journey. Ken-thu approached his chieftain, bowing low and tracing on the grass the three interlocking circles of ceremony, sign that he would speak with the chieftain on matters of moment.

"Speak!" said Nan-a-ta, and Ken-thu obeyed.

"Great Chieftain," he said, "were it not well to send one to Sar-no-m'rai, lest he slay Tsu-ven by stealth, thinking thus to make secure your rule?"

Nan-a-ta thought an instant, then whistled shrilly. Su came running, and him Nan-a-ta instructed, saying:

"Go you to the camp of Tsu-ven; seek out Sar-no-m'rai; say to him that Tsu-ven must live. It is said! Go!"

Su bowed, replied:

"It is said!" and at once set out. Nan-a-ta returned to his fire and flung himself on a pile of skins to rest.

At noon the party marched, following for three days the windings of the river, and at dusk of the third day they camped within two hours' march of the home of the Ta-an.

Nan-a-ta gave the order to rest, for the journey had been swift, and the men, though eager for the fight, were weary. Food was produced from girdle and bundle, and the men ate, though no fires were built, then they lay down or sat, relaxed and resting, waiting for dark.

Tah-né had been left behind, under guard of three warriors, and Nan-a-ta sat on a fallen log, meditating on her, wondering idly whether he would see her again or would fall in the coming fight. He shook himself, throwing off the depressing thought, and looked about at his men.

Night had fallen, and the full, round moon was climbing above the tree-tops; soon it would be time to march, for the chieftain desired full moonlight, that his men might distinguish friend from foe.

Of a sudden, at the upper end of the little glade where lay the band, a bush rustled, a twig snapped, and Nan-a-ta looked up to see a warrior, ten paces away, staring at him. The chieftain recognized one of Tsu-ven's closest adherents, and leaped to his feet, crying:

"Let him not escape!"

With the words the warrior cast a startled glance about, took in the forms of the men, and, wheeling, fled through the forest like a frightened deer. Arrows whistled after him and all about him, and a score of the fleetest dashed in pursuit, but he evaded them and was gone. At once Nan-a-ta called his men together, ordering them to march in all haste.

"No time must be given Tsu-ven to prepare; his force is equal to ours, and should he be ready the battle would be long and hard. On surprise depends an easy victory. It is said!"

The men fell into rank and, led by Nan-a-ta and Ken-thu, took up the long, swinging trot which eats the miles. Resting

once, they came about the third hour of the night to the homes of the tribesmen, to the spot where the river, curving away from the hills, left the flat and open meadow whereon Ban and Su and Men-ah had fought the warriors of Tsu-ven.

Rounding a bend, the attackers came on this meadow, and Nan-a-ta, leading, groaned aloud—too late! The alarm had been given, and a hundred warriors, full-armed, drawn up in ranks, waited!

Never breaking their pace, the attacking force swung out on a long front and gradually increasing their speed, bore down on the waiting lances. From the hillside leaped and glowed fires which with the cold moon cast a weird light over the scene as with crash of arms the battle joined.

Then over the peaceful valley spread a fearful uproar; clash of arms, thud of blows on soft flesh, cries of rage, shrieks of agony as ax or lance or dagger bit home, groans of wounded and dying men—and ever as an undertone the murmur of the gentle river that here rippled over broad shallows.

Backward and forward swayed the fight, men tripping and stumbling over bodies that writhed or—more horrible yet—lay still; men slipping on the wet grass, trampling it into a yet more frightful quagmire; men, their weapons broken, fighting with tooth and fist and knee; men tearing at each other's throats and eyes with naked hands; men crawling on hands and knees from the battle, to try in vain to stanch their ghastly wounds, or, plunging and twisting in unspeakable tortures, creeping aside to die!

Backward and forward the battle raged, the advantage now with one side, now with the other, till at length Nan-a-ta saw signs of weakening in the forces of Tsu-ven and rallied his own followers with a ringing call.

Bravely did they respond, and with fierce rush drove back the others. Tsu-ven, seeing the fight going against him, turned and fled, his men—those that remained—following in swift flight up the hillside to the great cave which was the usurper's home.

Here they barricaded the opening with

rocks, and for a time were safe. Nan-a-ta posted a guard and with his men returned to the battle-field.

By orders of Nan-a-ta succor was given to friend and foe alike. "Are they not our brothers?" said he—and when the sun rose only the ghastly trampled grass, red from the fight, showed where the battle had raged under the calm and quiet moon.

Not more than half of Tsu-ven's followers had escaped to the shelter of the cave, and Nan-a-ta had likewise suffered sorely, though not so greatly—a score and two of his men had fallen or were mortally wounded—so it was no surprise to him when with the first gleams of dawn he saw five priests, Sa-ko in the lead, making their way down the hillsides to where the main body of the attackers had camped.

Sa-ko, it seemed, wished to avoid further bloodshed. Would Nan-a-ta consent to leave the matter to the will of the Great Father? Once before had the Great Father decided in favor of Tsu-ven, and it might be that Nan-a-ta would now hesitate, but could he hope for the favor of O-Ma-Ken did he flout the wishes of the Great Father? Did he not crave the blessing of O-Ma-Ken, even though the chieftaincy were denied him? Were it not best to let the Great Father declare his will once more, thus avoiding further battle and loss of life?

Nan-a-ta showed a doubtful face, but inwardly he laughed that Sa-ko should thus play into his hand; more than all else did he crave a trial of magic before the assembled tribe. So he allowed Sa-ko to persuade him, and agreed to a test by magic on the following day, stipulating only that Tsu-ven and his followers should come unarmed.

Sa-ko agreed and departed, chuckling to himself as he thought of the gullibility of Nan-a-ta, who would ere long, he thought, give up his life on the Great Altar, whereby would the power of the priests grow great indeed!

Word was quickly passed among the tribesmen, and on the next day all were assembled at the Lesser Altar, precisely as the year before, save only that now Nan-a-ta's men were placed in the front rank,

conspicuous among them Sar-no-m'rai, who had left Tsu-ven before the battle, and now grinned maliciously at the usurper as he thought of those followers of Tsu-ven's who had "disappeared."

When all were in their places Sa-ko spoke to the multitude, saying:

"Before us stand once more the son of A-ta and the son of the Lord of the Winged Death, each seeking the chieftaincy of the Ta-an. Let O-Ma-Ken decide as once before! To this is each agreed. First, then, the turning wand! Tsu-ven, the ivory staff!"

Tsu-ven stepped forward, handing the staff of ceremony to Sa-ko, who laid it on the altar as once before, motioning to Nan-a-ta and Tsu-ven to take their places. Each did so, but at a sign from Nan-a-ta certain of his men edged slightly forward as though seeking a better view.

Ere ever the staff began to move, ere ever Sa-ko lifted his voice in prayer, Nan-a-ta whistled shrilly, and his men sprang forward, seizing each a priest from behind.

Tsu-ven started toward the altar, but ere he had taken one step a firm grasp on his throat and the point of a dagger pricking his skin warned him that Ban, who held him, would tolerate no attempt at escape. Then Nan-a-ta strode before the altar, raising his voice to the people:

"Men and women of the Ta-an," he cried, "be not deceived! The boasted magic of the priests is but trickery, fit only for children! See, now, the magic of the turning wand, also the battle of the arrows!"

He turned toward the altar, while a gasp of horror ran through the crowd at such words of sacrilege, and many turned their eyes toward the heavens, fearing a lightning stroke on the blasphemer. But the sun shone clear and bright, and Nan-a-ta raised from the altar the ivory staff, while Sa-ko squirmed in the fierce grip of L'vu, who held him by throat and wrist.

"See now," cried Nan-a-ta, "the hairs from the tail of the horse, whereby the miracle is wrought!" And he passed the ivory staff before the crowd, that all might see the hairs, fixed by a touch of wax.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the multitude, and voices exclaimed:

"In very truth!"

"Nay," said Nan-a-ta, turning once more to the altar, "magic can my followers do also. Kan-to, on the Great Altar there burns the Sacred Fire; bring me, I pray, a coal, carrying it in your hand."

Kan-to bowed and hastened to the Great Altar, three hundred paces away, the eyes of the crowd following him. There he busied himself for a moment, and presently returned, the coal glowing on his palm. Nan-a-ta received it in his own hand and Kan-to, returning to his place in the crowd showed his hand, unharmed, to the eagerly peering men and women. Meanwhile, Nan-a-ta had kindled a fire on the flat top of the altar and addressed the people once more:

"People of the Ta-an, by night should the miracle of the lightning be shown. Yet, this being day—watch well!" He passed his hand swiftly over the fire, and instantly a flash of light leaped from the altar, heavy clouds of smoke rolling upward. With one impulse the watchers fell on their knees, crying aloud:

"Have mercy, Great Chieftain! Spare us, Son of the Great Father!"

"Nay," said Nan-a-ta, spreading out his hands, "have I not told you, my people, that these are but tricks? Kneel not in awe; Great Chieftain am I, yet but a man like yourselves. Yet would you see magic"—he turned to Ban, saying: "Release the son of the Lord of the Winged Death. Give him a bow and quiver of arrows." This was quickly done, and Nan-a-ta said to Tsu-ven:

"Son of the Lord of the Winged Death, in very truth should you be an archer of skill. Step now five tens of paces from me and speed three arrows against my bosom."

Tsu-ven's eyes gleamed with savage joy—indeed, his enemy had delivered himself into his hands, for none other of the Ta-an could handle bow and arrows as could Tsu-ven, nor did Nan-a-ta carry a shield. Unprotected save for a thin garment of wolf-skin, Nan-a-ta stood by the altar, and eagerly Tsu-ven grasped the weapons, pacing off the distance and facing about. Nan-

a-ta drew from his girdle a wand a cubit in length and the thickness of a man's thumb and said:

"This wand is my shield; your arrows may not pass it! Speed them as you will, Tsu-ven!"

The crowd stared in wonder; how could a slim wand guard against the Winged Death? Open-eyed, amazed, they watched, and Tsu-ven, triumph gleaming on his face, strung his bow. With care he chose an arrow and fitted it to the string; back to his ear he drew it—held it an instant—opened his fingers, and like a flash of light the arrow sped.

Quicker than the eye could see, the wand of Nan-a-ta leaped—and the arrow, swept aside, clattered on the hard rocks behind the living target.

Amazed, chagrined, Tsu-ven fitted and sped a second arrow, with like result—again, and the third dart was swept away.

In rage Tsu-ven dashed the bow to the ground, and Nan-a-ta faced the crowd once more, about to speak—Tsu-ven seized the bow, swiftly laid another arrow to it, and shot—Nan-a-ta, craftily watching from the corner of his eye, saw all, whirled, turned the arrow, and laughed, even as Ban, with panther spring, bore Tsu-ven to the ground.

"Nay, Tsu-ven," said Nan-a-ta, "not even from behind can you slay me!"

Dumfounded, the crowd looked from one to the other, shaking their heads, and Nan-a-ta, smiling with quiet satisfaction, thrust the wand once more into his girdle—long hours had he and Sen-va spent in the forest, practising that sleight-of-hand!

Casting a look about—noting that Sa-ko, tight held in the mighty hands of L'vu, was fairly foaming at the mouth with rage—Nan-a-ta spoke again:

"Men of the Ta-an, can any among you call back a weapon or stick or stone which you have hurled?"

The people with one accord shook their heads, and one, bolder than the rest, replied:

"Nay, Great Chieftain, that can no man do! What is gone is gone!"

Nan-a-ta smiled and, stooping, lifted from the ground a bent stick which lay there. Of the length of a man's arm was

it, and half the thickness; crooked in the middle, seeming, indeed, like a half-bent arm.

"Watch well!" he cried, and balanced it an instant in his hand, holding by the longer end. Two quick steps forward he took, bent low and to the side, and with an upward sweep of his arm hurled the stick from him.

Low over the heads of the crowd it sped, barely skimming above them, then far out over the valley it soared, rising as it flew till it poised, spinning swiftly, against the clear blue sky, like a bird, three hundred paces and more away. Heads turned, people watched its flight, and Nan-a-ta, rising, stretched out his arm, crying in a loud voice:

"Stick, return!"

The stick seemed to hear and heed the call—it rose still higher—turned in a graceful circle—swooped downward—spun over the crowd—and fell, gently, softly, at its master's feet! Nan-a-ta picked it up and thrust it also into his girdle, while the crowd shivered—this was indeed a master of magic whom they had cast out!

Sa-ko, raging, struggled loose from the slack hand of L'vu—L'vu himself had never seen the marvel of the returning stick—and ran forward.

"Tricks!" he yelled. "What are these, but tricks? Can you believe these things are done by power from on high? Be not so credulous, People of the Mountain Caves!"

"Nay," broke in Nan-a-ta, "not by me has it been said that these are miracles! Yet, Sa-ko, I have done your tricks, do you now mine, if tricks they be!" And drawing the wand and the bent stick from his girdle he held them out to the Chief Priest, crying at the same time: "Sen-va, a bow and arrows for me!"

The crowd howled its approval, and Sa-ko shrank back even as L'vu's mighty hand closed once more on him. The people yelled and shrieked in derision, but Nan-a-ta quieted them with upraised hand.

"Tricks, perchance, yet tricks the priests cannot do! Yet follows more, men of the Ta-an."

He paused and looked about, then con-

tinued, slowly and impressively: "People of the Mountain Caves, into my hands was given the staff of ceremony, carven from the tooth of Do-m'rai, the Hill That Walks. To me was it given by T-san-va-men, Lord of the Winged Death, he saying: 'Labor ever for the welfare of the tribe, sparing not life nor limb in their service.' This did I swear, before O-Ma-Ken, the Great Father. So also did Tsu-ven vow, as ye heard. Has Tsu-ven kept his oath?"

A deep and angry growl ran through the crowd, and Nan-a-ta went on:

"Into the hands of its rightful master has the ivory staff returned, even as the thrown stick returned to my calling. People of the Mountain Caves, is not the life of Tsu-ven forfeit?"

"In very truth! Forfeit! Forfeit!" came the shouted answer, and when the cries died down Nan-a-ta spoke again:

"Yet would I give Tsu-ven his chance of life. Behold, men of the Ta-an, yonder lies the cave where I, Nan-a-ta, did dwell. Beside the mouth there rests a giant boulder. Let Tsu-ven enter the cave, which shall then be closed by rolling the rock before it; let him remain three days; if he come forth, then shall he live, but if he come not forth, then will I take his place, cleaving the rock in proof that my words are true. Is it good?"

"Good!" cried some, and others: "It needs not, Great Chieftain!" But Nan-a-ta raised his hand, saying:

"It is my will!"

Then to the cave was Tsu-ven hurried, trembling, shaking in every limb, crying aloud for mercy. His weapons were given him, and the rock was rolled before the cave-mouth, a watch being set. Sa-ko and the other priests were held close prisoner, and for three days the watch endured.

At first were cries heard, with groans—also, sounds as though the prisoner were pecking at the rock. But gradually these were stilled, and when at the end of the time the rock was rolled away by the might of many hands Tsu-ven was found prostrate, haggard, worn, a pitiable object, huddled in a corner of the cave.

They raised him to his feet and led him forth, shuddering. He passed his hand

across his eyes as though the light were painful, and fell at Nan-a-ta's feet, begging miserably for pardon, for mercy, for a swift death. Nan-a-ta looked scornfully at the cowering wretch and strode into the cave, turning to say:

"To-morrow at this hour will I come forth!"

The rock was rolled before the cave, and the people waited—few indeed returned to their caves, but fires were built and food eaten on the spot. From time to time they was a stir within the crowd as one or another came or left, but for the most part they sat silent, watching.

From within the cave there came the sounds of blows, but after a few hours these also ceased, as had those of Tsu-ven, and all was silent.

Tsu-ven and Sa-ko and the other priests were herded in a little circle, enclosed by an armed guard, and Tsu-ven found words to say:

"The sounds are hushed; it may be that his magic has deserted him!"

"Nay," replied Sa-ko, shaking his head despondently, "that would be too good fortune! We may not think it!"

For a long time no sound was heard from the cave; the night passed away, its silence broken only by the rush of the stream, the whispering of the trees, the crackle of the fires, and from time to time the cry of some hunting beast. All the tribesmen were clustered about the cave, and when dawn came all eyes were turned toward the mighty rock.

No sound, no stir! Quiet, silent, motionless, its huge bulk still blocked the way. A great sigh went up from the crowd, a sigh of disappointment—they had hoped for a miracle! Hoped? Nay, believed! And now they were betrayed!

But even as the sigh arose there came a crackling from the boulder; a slight noise, in truth, but one that caught all ears. Toward the rock the people pressed, and one cried:

"See! A rift!" And sure enough there was to be seen a faint crack, no more than a line, on the surface of the stone. Now from within there sounded once more the sound of hammering, then silence fell. But now none moved without; intent, eager,

they watched—an hour passed—another—and then, just as disappointment was seizing the people, the cracking noise sounded again—the rift widened—the noise grew to a rending, tearing sound as though a mountain were being riven apart—and with tremendous roar the great rock split in two—the halves fell apart—and forth from the cave stepped Nan-a-ta!

With one accord the waiting people fell to their knees, they bent forward, heads to the ground—this was a god! They had believed, in truth, that he would escape; this had they known, convinced of his power by the marvels they had seen—but that he should rend the huge rock!

"Hail, Master of Magic! Look with favor on thy people, Child of a God!" rose the cry as Nan-a-ta strode into the sunlight.

From the rear of the crowd there leaped a young, lithe figure, running swiftly up the slope toward Nan-a-ta—it was Tah-né. Into her lover's arms she flung herself, sobbing on his shoulder, while he patted her gently and whispered soothing words.

"My love, my love!" she cried. "I have feared; with terror has my heart been filled!"

"Foolish one!" he answered, half laughing. "Had you no faith in Nan-a-ta?"

But she clung to him, sobbing and laughing together, while the people of the Ta-an, sensing that their god was in kindly mood, took heart and pressed closer, clinging about his knees and begging forgiveness for the wrong they had done.

At length Nan-a-ta succeeded in quieting the people, and called a council of the elders to decide the fate of Tsu-ven and the priests. At the Rock of Council they met, and after a debate which lasted till late in the afternoon, it was resolved that the minor priests, who were thought to have been misled by Sa-ko, should be deprived of their office, but their lives should be spared; Tsu-ven and Sa-ko, conspirators to set aside the will of the Lord of the Winged Death, must die.

A messenger was sent to the cave where the prisoners were held, and presently the guard returned, leading the lesser priests,

dragging Tsu-ven, and carrying Sa-ko. Nan-a-ta and the elders watched this strange procession as it wound down the mountain and made its way through the crowd about the Rock of Council. Deeply did they wonder at the meaning, but naught was said till the guard halted before the waiting men, when it was explained.

By some means unknown, Sa-ko had procured a dagger of flint and had slain himself; Tsu-ven, close at hand, had lacked the courage to seize the weapon and do likewise—indeed, the once proud and haughty chieftain was in a pitiful state of collapse from utter terror. His face was ashy pale, his mouth quivered, his knees would not support him—two stout warriors had been forced to drag him, his head lolling weakly from side to side.

Nan-a-ta surveyed the wretched man not without compassion; never had he seen a warrior of the Ta-an fear death, nor was the sight a pleasant one. But for Tsu-ven's crime could there be no forgiveness, and the chieftain passed sentence.

"Tsu-ven," he said, "it is the will of the elders that for your crimes you pass into the Long Dark. Yet since you are son to a chieftain and yourself a warrior—albeit no very bold one—you are spared the shameful death of the common offender. When the sun next gilds the mountain-top shall you fall before the arrows of your guard. It is said!"

In a very agony of fear Tsu-ven flung himself prostrate before Nan-a-ta, crying aloud for mercy, for pardon; groveling, promising never to offend, begging for exile—slavery—anything, so that his life be spared—vowing to serve Nan-a-ta faithfully, if he might but live! Nan-a-ta surveyed the coward with contempt, then waved his hand, repeating:

"It is said!" and the guards, stepping forward, laid their hands on Tsu-ven's shoulders to lift him and lead him away. But with the touch strength came back to him, and Tsu-ven, looking wildly about, sprang to his feet, burst frantically through the crowd, and rushed madly down the trail along the river.

"Ken-thu!" barked Nan-a-ta, and Ken-thu, with the spring of a leopard, bound-

ed on the Rock of Council. Swiftly he flung his bow to the front, snatched an arrow from the quiver, and fitted it to the string. A hundred paces down the trail Tsu-ven fled, and all thought him safe, for he was nearing a bend, nor could any of the tribe outrun the fleeing man.

Back to his ear Ken-thu drew the string—held it an instant—released it. The arrows of Ken-thu were stained with yellow, and as this leaped from the bow the sunlight caught it, so that to the watchers it seemed a streak of fire in pursuit. Like a flash of flame it leaped—vanished—Tsu-ven stumbled—flung wide his arms—pitched forward—and lay still!

A great sigh broke from the crowd, and Ken-thu turned to leap from the Rock of Council, a grim smile of satisfaction on his lips—A-ai was avenged!

"It is well," said Nan-a-ta. "Thus is he spared some hours of misery, and the end is the same—it is well!"

Some days later Nan-a-ta and his bride sat in their cave, watching the sun sink to rest behind the hills. A new priest clan had been chosen by the council of the Ta-an and Nan-a-ta had been duly inducted into his high office as Great Chieftain, after which he and Tah-né had been married by the tribal ceremony, the two then going to the cave where had lived and died the Lord of the Winged Death, there to make their permanent home.

The evening meal had now been eaten and the cooking tripod placed in its accustomed corner, and the Great Chieftain and his wife sat now in silence, meditating on their changes of fortune. At length Tah-né spoke:

"Tell me, my husband," said she, "how is the marvel of the returning stick performed? The shielding wand, as you have said, is but swiftness and skill; the rock, you declare, was riven by wedges of wood, driven into a crack and swelling under the pouring of water; but to me still remains unknown why the stick returns."

"To me as well, Tah-né," was the answer. "By chance did I learn that a stick of certain shape, thrown in a certain man-

ner, returns to the thrower's hand; the reason is unknown to me as to you."

Tah-né thought for a time, then said:  
"But is not this a miracle?"

"Nay, is the storm a miracle? Is the rising of the sun a miracle? Thus has the Great Father ordained; thus shall it be—and even so does the stick return, nor do we know the cause. No miracle, in truth!"

Tah-né meditated for some moments, then spoke again:

"Husband of mine," she said, "to me does it seem that you have failed in your high purpose."

"In what manner? Am I not Great Chieftain? Are not Tsu-ven and Sa-ko treading the Long Dark? Are not the People of the Mountain Caves once more free?"

"In very truth! Yet was it not in your mind to teach the people that miracles are but knowledge and skill? That all powers come from the Great Father and are as free to one as to another, to artist and warrior and hunter as to priests? And yet, having shown them the marvels of the priests and the marvels you have devised, with the causes thereof, are you not hailed by all as Master of Magic and Child of a God?"

(The End.)

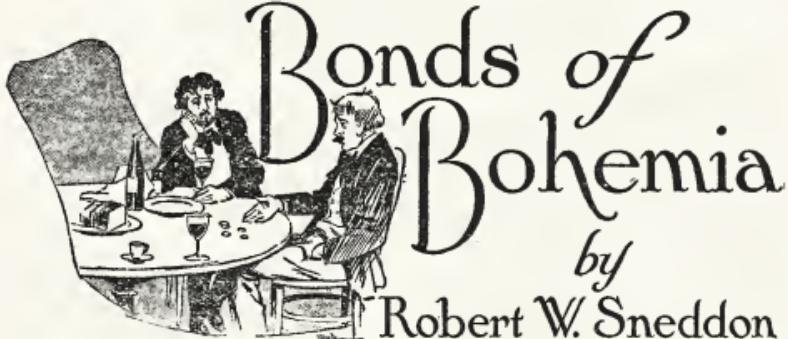
Nan-a-ta laughed a little ruefully, then answered:

"In truth, thus far have I failed. And yet—and yet—perchance there may arise one greater than I, who shall teach them, making them believe that the Great Father rules all, nor is he to be commanded by men. For me it remains to rule as well and wisely as may be, following whither He shall lead."

Tah-né moved closer to her husband, her hand resting lightly on his shoulder. His arm about her waist, he drew her nearer still, his cheek against her hair. For a time no sound was heard save only the snapping and crackling of the fire, the rustling of the wind in the trees, and, below, the murmur of the river. At length Tah-né, turning her head, looked shyly up at her husband, whispering low:

"In truth, my love, whatever comes, for me shall you remain always the Master of Magic, and Child of a God."

Tighter still he held her, and thus they sat, while the glow faded from the western sky and the myriad stars, themselves the miracle of miracles, peeped one by one through the blue curtain of the spreading heavens.



**A**n elderly man with a parchment face creased in a thousand wrinkles, eyes red and rheumy, a weatherbeaten hat on which had descended the rains of many years, a patched coat buttoned up to the neck where it was held together by a rusty safety-pin, deplorable trousers, and

shoes a network of leather ribbon, and with one glove upon his clawlike hand—such a man was talking earnestly to Charlot as I came upon him outside the Rotonde.

Suddenly Charlot slipped a coin into the hand of his old man, and with a clap on the back sent him about his business.

I sat down beside Charlot, who still wore a remote look as if at that moment he had been confronted by the past.

"There," he said finally, "goes the last of the Bohemians—old Father Coupeau."

"Coupeau!" I repeated. The name had stirred some recollection in my mind.

"Yes, the famous old serial writer. Ten years ago every nursery maid in Paris lived overnight only that she might get the next instalment of 'The Orphan of Belleville' or 'The Mistress of the Marquis.' He made money in those days, did old Coupeau. But he had not sense enough to free himself from the bonds of Bohemia."

"H-m!" I commented. "You are free enough yourself, now, to travel along the road to prosperity. There is one of your milestones that must please your heart and your pocket."

I pointed to an advertising pillar, one of those affairs which stand along the edge of the Paris sidewalks, covered with theatrical announcements. Prominent on this one Charlot's name stood out as author of two separate revues.

"My pocket, yes. My heart, no. I was a poet once," Charlot answered dolefully.

I laughed. The former poet was plump as a tub of lard, and his clothes came from a tailor who assuredly was not patronized by the inhabitants of the Latin Quarter.

"Money!" continued the ex-poet scornfully. "What is money? Do you remember that when old Dumas was dying in comparative want, this old magician of romance who had made millions in his day, pointed to a twenty-franc gold piece lying on his mantelpiece. 'Fifty years ago,' he said to his son, 'when I came to Paris, I had a golden louis. Why have people accused me of being a spendthrift? I came with a louis—I have a louis now. See, there it is.' And he could laugh at his own joke.

"Well, I shall end like that, no doubt. Meanwhile, why worry? Heaven! I worried enough when I was younger. Poets have six lives, to paraphrase Balzac's journalist. Let me tell you how the second of mine was preserved for that ignoble purpose," but there was no regret that I could trace in his tone as he pointed to the pillar.

I lit my pipe and settled easily in the corner of the café to listen to his escape.

Ten years ago Charlot was waging war on the Philistines in the company of a clever etcher, Caparolle, aided and abetted at times by the presence of their respective muses, Marcelle and Suzanne, who came and went according to the state of the common exchequer. Needless to say it never overflowed with plenty, and ingenuity which ought by rights to have gone toward furthering their progress in the arts was more often directed toward enacting again the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

If Charlot sold a poem, a feat worthy of praise and only accomplished at the cost of shoe leather and infinite industry, the money which he brought home was laid out in a way which insured the most for the money. Caparolle disposed of an occasional etching, or did a piece of commercial work and poured his handful of francs into the paws of the landlord or the tradesman whose credit had not been abused.

There were times, too frequent to be enjoyable, when this pair of industrious citizens of Bohemia were hard put to it even to nourish themselves, much less their little friends, and on those mournful occasions Marcelle and Suzanne betook themselves to their old jobs as milliners. If they could they would rather have been fashioning wreaths of laurel for the brows of their respective admirers, but that being beyond their powers, they did the next best thing, turned to hatmaking, and so relieved the economic pressure.

It was at one of those periods when the money which had descended upon them by a providence almost divine, except that its channel had been through the unwilling hands of M. Toquet, their late landlord, in a manner which I have set forth previously, when this money had melted away owing to certain excusable extravagances, that the pair awakened to the stern realization that between them and starvation there stood the sum of five francs.

Marcelle and Suzanne made the usual *au revoirs* with many tears, and retired to the establishment of Mme. Renaud, and the poet and the etcher sat down to consider the gloomy future.

As it did not seem that the proper inspiration as to a course of action could be brought to the surface while hunger gnawed at their vitals, they resolved to go forth, demolish food—five francs' worth, to be exact—and trust to this feeding of the furnace of energy to create some method of eluding the doom which hung over their devoted heads.

The plan pleased them, and locking the door of their lodging, they descended the narrow wooden stairs warily, and watching an opportunity when the dragon of the portals, the ever alert *concierge* was absent on an errand, slipped out without challenge for their rent, now long overdue, and strode hastily to a restaurant bearing the appetizing title of *Au bon Appetit*. As the restaurant had been but lately opened by a new proprietor, a M. Apollinaire who then had no dreams of the well-known eating-house, the Golden Snail, and as their dealings so far had fortunately been on a strictly cash basis, they imagined that by putting in another appearance as moneyed clients, if the worst came to the worst later, the heart of Casimir Apollinaire might be moved to clemency for a week or so anyway.

Casimir greeted them affably, unaware of their nefarious designs, and saw that they were seated, exchanging the compliments of the day as blithely with them as if they had been American millionaires or English milords. Luckily he did not see what they saw, the gaunt specter of the future which had stalked in with them.

"Ah, now," said Charlot cheerfully, sniffing the savory odors. "Now we shall get an idea. Pass me that bottle of wine, my boy."

But, strange to say, as they proceeded by stages from *hors d'oeuvres* to cream cheese, no revelation came to them. Food generated no genius for strategy. The future remained still a mystery.

"Another bottle of wine," Caparolle suggested.

"Two! And a cigar for each of us. They say a good cigar loosens the brain."

Time passed in the consumption of those luxuries.

"Strange!" Charlot remarked. "Tobacco is no use. I can think of nothing but my breakfast and where it is to come from."

"How about a little glass of cognac?" Caparolle suggested. "We can afford that."

"Two," Charlot insisted firmly. "The deuce! I hope that *concierge* is going to be reasonable. She was too amiable this morning. That looks bad for to-morrow, my dear Caparolle."

"To-morrow!" cried Caparolle, in whom his various potations were creating strangely happy hallucinations. "That for to-morrow."

"All very well for you, Caparolle," Charlot reminded him. "You never have any appetite in the morning, but I invariably wake up ravenous. Without food I cannot write, and without writing I cannot feed. *Ergo—ergo—I die*. There is nothing left for me but death."

"Death!" echoed a deep voice at their elbow. "Death. Delightful word!"

Caparolle started.

"Avant!" he whispered, looking about him fearfully.

Charlot had discovered that the utterance came from a stout, well-fed gentleman in black who sat at the next table stuffing down food at great speed.

"You are speaking of death," went on the gentleman, taking breath and beaming upon them. "I could not help overhearing you. Fascinating subject."

"I am glad you think so," said Charlot stiffly. "You would not be so glib about it if you were in my place."

"Dear me," continued their neighbor. "Consider it now. What state can be so wonderful as death? An end to all cares, a beautiful repose, tender hands to commit you to your last long sleep. Happy oblivion."

"This is very strange talk," said Caparolle, blinking at him, and speaking very thickly. "Perhaps we have the honor of speaking to a student of strange deaths—note that phrase, my dear Charlot—it is amazing—Heaven, why am I not a poet? What is your line, master food gobbler, the coisoned pup — pardon me — the pol-

soned cup, the knife or the pen which stabs as cruelly.

"If you are a critic—allow me to introduce ourselves. Caparolle, etcher, and Charlot, beloved of the muses—poetry on any subject—cash on delivery. Reduction on quantity. A little publicity from you would not come amiss."

The stranger shook his head with a benign smile.

"You are on the wrong track, my dear M. Caparolle, my dear M. Charlot. I am neither a murderer nor a journalist. I might describe myself, since you are curious, as a philosopher—a philanthropist."

"I have heard of such beings," rejoined Charlot, amazed; "but I must confess I never expected to see a philanthropist in the flesh. Still, what you tell me does not explain your predilection for death. I am not above telling you that at the moment I have some vague idea of saying adieu to this bright world. In fact, *monsieur*, there is every prospect of my having to eat salad by the root some few feet below earth's green coverlet."

Their neighbor's eye seemed to be measuring Charlot from head to foot, and the poet grew uneasy under the scrutiny.

"What is it?" he asked.

"One of our stock sizes," answered the gentleman dreamily. "Yes. I fancy we could fit you out very nicely. If you care to go to the expense, I think I could promise you a thoroughly satisfactory job. Is it possible that you are contemplating suicide?"

"Heaven!" cried Caparolle. "I may warn you that my friend may prattle of suicide, but between ourselves he has not the slightest intention of carrying out any of his threats."

"Thank you, my dear Caparolle," said Charlot gratefully. "I knew you would step in at the crucial moment and save me from my rashness. As for you, tempter, I am afraid that I cannot join the suicide club in which you are interested, for such I take it is the idea which lies at the root of your mysterious hints."

It was their new friend's turn to look blank. With a graceful flourish of his hand

as though he opened a carriage door he drew out a pocketbook and handed them a card:

**ALPHONSE CROQUEMORT**

DIRECTOR OF FUNERALS

"Ten classes," he announced sonorously. "Ten classes of funerals. First-class, service at the church, draperies inside and outside, catafalque, candles innumerable, music, flowers, silver hearse, pall with silver tear-drops, symbolical of the eyes which weep the passing of the beloved. Or perhaps another class, not so expensive, but quite satisfactory, I can promise you, positively consoling to the bereaved mourner—comfortable casket, couch of chaste repose—"

"*Dieu!*" Caparolle interrupted, "in a minute I shall be tempted to make away with myself. You are no funeral director, you are a poet, my dear Alphonse."

"I have been called so in my time," said M. Croquemort with a gratified smile; "several of my epitaphs have had quite a vogue. One in particular—'Now at rest, Heaven's guest'—has been in great demand this past season. The idea is rather appealing."

"Stop!" Charlot commanded, a bright vision of easy money rising before his eyes. "I have an idea. I am looking for something to do just now—some work not too arduous. Suppose I engage myself to supply you with suitable verses, guaranteed to comfort the living and please the departed. A reduction for a quantity, eh?"

The undertaker shook his head.

"I am desolated. I have all the inscriptions I want for the present. I compose my own in my spare time."

Charlot's face fell.

"Wait a minute," said the undertaker. "You seem a good fellow, and I'd like to help you out. Can you drive a carriage?"

"I can," replied the poet. "May I refer you to Caparolle."

"As a charioteer," responded the etcher,

"Charlot is more than marvelous. He is superb. Two horses, four, six—it makes no difference. His mastery of the reins is magnificent. Only let me warn you, my dear Alphonse, for so I may call you as a comrade, his talents must be rewarded magnificently if he is called upon to forsake art for the cart."

"You hear," exclaimed Charlot. "Might I ask if you have some plan which will put money in my pocket? Any other is out of my consideration."

"I perceive," said the undertaker with a wry smile, "that when it comes to driving a hard bargain, you are an expert driver. Well, I am in a hole. I have a funeral to-morrow morning at six o'clock. One of my drivers has gone off on a spree, and I have found no one to fill his place. If you care to make five francs and your breakfast—"

"Breakfast!" cried Charlot. "Say no more. I accept. Only six o'clock; that is a devil of an hour to be up at. Still I can do it for once. And you want me to drive a coach?"

"And pair. Yes. Only a short distance to Montparnasse Cemetery. A first-class funeral, too. I would not think of asking you to make your débüt in the profession on any other occasion. I have the honor of superintending the interment of M. Anatole Souvestre."

"Why, I knew him," ejaculated Charlot. "I have been to his house several times. So the old boy is gone. What a pity! He was always kind to artists. He will be missed by his friends. Heaven! His house was always full of people eating his sandwiches, and guzzling down his wine. And not an heir to inherit his money. Too bad!"

"Well, it is agreed, then, that you will come to the stable," said M. Croquemort as he scribbled the address on his card. "Here is where we shall meet at five-thirty. And now to part. *Au revoir*, M. Caparolle—pleased to be of service any time. *Au revoir*, my friend."

When he had gone Caparolle whistled.

"Well, you are fixed now, old boy."

"Not a word of this to Marcelle," Charlot begged. "There is quite a difference

between Pegasus and a funeral nag, and the less said about the matter the better. Five francs, eh. Well, at least we shall eat to-morrow, Caparolle."

They rose. M. Apollinaire took his dues, and the waiter the rest of their five francs, and penniless the brothers in misfortune returned to their lodging.

Charlot spent a wretched night. He dreamed that he was required to blacken himself from head to foot and clad only in a plume of black feathers as headgear drive slowly up the Boul' Mich' amidst the jeers of his friends.

Caparolle was sleeping like a blameless infant when the poet with many a groan dressed himself and stole forth to his appointment.

M. Croquemort was at hand at the stable and invested him in an enormous great-coat and cocked hat before leading him to a near-by wine shop where the amateur coachman fortified himself against the raw morning air. A little later the procession set out, led by the well-dressed director.

Very few of M. Souvestre's friends were on hand, which was not surprising, considering the hour, and Charlot was spared the shame of having to reveal himself to any one he knew. In fact, the coach which he drove had but one occupant, a sour-faced little man who carried a large portfolio and was half asleep.

The cortège drove into the cemetery and the mourners descended, shivering.

Charlot had just settled down to a snooze on the box of the coach when a raucous voice hailed him.

"Hi, there. Rabbit face."

And looking down from his perch he saw a large and ferocious giant shaking an enormous fist at him. It occurred to Charlot suddenly that contact with that ham-bone would be extremely fatal to his beauty, and he addressed a polite inquiry to the new arrival.

"What's the trouble, comrade?"

"The trouble is that you are sitting on my seat, driving my coach. Don't think I am going to let any grasshopper do me out of my job."

"You are drunk, my lad," said Charlot reproachfully.

TO READERS OF  
**The Argosy**

THE ARGOSY and the ALL-STORY magazines will be consolidated with the issues of July 24th—next week. The title of the consolidated magazine will be

**ARGOSY  
ALL-STORY  
WEEKLY**

These two magazines are very much alike. Each is an all-fiction magazine and each carries the same type of stories. The authors who have been writing for *The Argosy* will continue writing for the consolidated magazine. So, too, will the authors who have been writing for the *All-Story Weekly* continue writing for the consolidated magazine.

**THE REASON FOR THIS CONSOLIDATION**

The cost of producing and marketing magazines is three times that of a few years ago. Most magazines have met this increased cost by a heavy advance in the selling price while we have clung to the ten cent price for

*The Argosy* and *All-Story* in spite of the always mounting costs. But the last advance in the price of print paper (the fourth advance within a year) so increased the cost of production that it became a question of advancing the selling price of *The Argosy* and *All-Story* or overcoming the added cost in some other way.

### CONSOLIDATION THE ONLY WAY OPEN

Through a consolidation of *The Argosy* and *All-Story* we can save all the cost of stories in one magazine, all the cost of the editorial force, all the cost of type-setting, all the cost of making electrotype plates and many other minor costs—an aggregate sufficiently large to enable us to go on a while longer at the old popular price of **Ten Cents** a copy, perhaps to go on permanently at ten cents—we hope so.

With these two magazines in consolidation, one set of stories does the work of two sets of stories at present—two sets of stories with all the other expenses. The contents of a magazine is not affected by the number of copies printed. The edition may be five thousand or five million, it is all the same with the contents.

### A BETTER MAGAZINE THAN EITHER HAS EVER BEEN

The consolidated *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* will be a better magazine than either *The Argosy* or *All-Story* has ever been, for the reason that the best authors of each will furnish the stories for the consolidated magazine. And, too, the consolidated magazine will have the best editorial talent of the two magazines.

Altogether, we can promise you in this consolidated magazine the best all-fiction magazine we have ever published, as good a magazine as any other house has ever published, or is now publishing, and the price will be less than the price of any other all-fiction magazine.

**Frank A. Munsey**

New York, July 17, 1920.

"None of your affair, *coquin de sort!* *Gare!* Get out, or I will pin a wooden cross on you. Back to the *bistro*, *bourgeois!*"

This last outrageous insult curdled the poet's blood, already half frozen. For a moment he had some idea of resistance, but after all a funeral was no place for brawling, and he prudently climbed down from his seat.

"Now, get a move on, my little man," growled the driver, assailing the poet's nostrils with a whiff of his past evening's debauch, and flourishing his fist. "Quick, or I'll make a mouthful of you. Off with that coat and hat. Now, run along, and if I catch you near the stables I'll paralyze you. See!"

The poet saw, and meekly surrendered his trappings, shivering with regret as he saw his five francs take wings, then moved out of reach of the threats which still fell about his ears.

So precipitate was his retreat that he did not stop going until he nearly fell into a trench and realized that he was in the midst of the mourners, among whom bustled the sour-faced little man whom he had driven.

"You are just in time," said he, catching Charlot by the sleeve. "Better late than never. A friend of the deceased, I believe."

"Yes," faltered Charlot. "Yes, I knew M. Souvestre."

"Your name and address, *monsieur*?"

Charlot furnished the desired information.

"Good," said the little man politely. "Might I trouble you to come back with the rest of the faithful friends of M. Souvestre. You can drive in my carriage."

"With pleasure!" agreed the bewildered poet, stepping hastily behind a tombstone as his friend, the director of funerals, went past, wearing a serene and happy smile. Charlot regarded his back bitterly. How was he to get his five francs from him?

Luckily for Charlot's skin the interloper on the box of the coach was sleeping when he reached it in company with the little man, and the poet skipped inside hastily.

His companion sat silent, snuffing from a silver box, and grunting at intervals, never opening his mouth till they arrived at the house of M. Souvestre, deceased.

"After you, my dear sir," he said, and Charlot obeyed him. The shock to the driver at the sight of this passenger was such that he reeled in his seat and continued to stare with unbelieving eyes till the poet was safely indoors.

"This way, M. Charlot," said his guide, ushering him with the other mourners into a large salon, where the poet stopped and rubbed his eyes.

On a table in the middle of the room was spread a feast such as he never expected to see again—cold chickens, ham, lobsters, salads, deserts, wine bottles by each glass, and wine upon the loaded buffet.

"In the name of M. Souvestre, I bid you welcome," said the sour-faced little man. "Sit down, gentlemen. You must be hungry. It was my late client's wish that you should not regret the inconvenience of this early morning, and that for the last time you should enjoy a hospitality which in his lifetime was unsparing."

As in a dream the poet ate and drank. Well, at any rate he was having his five francs worth. Only there was Caparolle awaiting his return. What would he say when his comrade arrived bloated with food, but without a sou in his pockets. Still, no use leaping to the sad conclusion, and cheerfully Charlot fought his way through to coffee and an excellent cigar.

At this point their host rose to his feet and put on an enormous pair of spectacles, clearing his throat.

"Your attention, my friends. I will not detain you long. No doubt you are wondering within yourselves what is the meaning of all this. Within this room, through which have passed so many who called themselves the friends of M. Souvestre are now gathered all those who have earned the right to that title. My late client fixed the hour of his funeral himself. It was to be at six o'clock in the morning, an hour inclement and unseasonable; but not apparently for those who desired to pay their last respects to an old and valued friend. The hour was announced to all who had

ever visited here. Some few notices went astray owing to change of address. Yours, for instance, M. Charlot—”

Charlot started guiltily as all eyes were turned upon him, and he blew his nose noisily to hide his confusion.

“Your emotion does you credit, my dear fellow,” said the attorney. “It shall not go unrewarded. Two hundred notices were issued. As I look around, me I see but thirty-five who responded, thinking less of their beds and more of their friend. Briefly the bulk of my clients’ estates is left to charities. A sum of seventeen thousand five hundred francs was, however, set aside, to be divided among those who attended the funeral of my late friend, who in his later years, had lost some of his faith in men, but not in all men. There is, therefore, due to each of you the sum of—of—hum—five hundred francs as a token of remembrance from our excellent friend. Permit me to give to each of you this little envelope and to wish you good-day and a pleasant memory. The spirit of our old comrade will be well pleased with all of you.”

Charlot received his envelope with trembling hands. At first he had wished to say “No, I have not deserved this;” but when he thought of Caparolle, and Marcelle, and Suzanne, and even of the *concierge*, he accepted that which fate had certainly thrust upon him as a reward for virtue.

He returned to find Caparolle rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

“Did you get the five francs, old man?” asked that worthy eagerly.

“No!” said Charlot, concealing his joy. “Alas, no!”

Caparolle groaned dismally.

“Then we are certainly in the soup.”

“Soup to nuts, my lad. I do not rise at six in the morning to earn a beggarly five francs. On the contrary, such is my virtue, which I commend you to emulate, slaggard, that it has been rewarded by the sum of five hundred francs. Here is your half, Caparolle,” he added, passing the notes to the etcher, who had retreated, thinking the poet’s head had been turned by misery. “If you are wise you will invest it in government stock. If you are foolish like me you will dress yourself and accompany me to Mme. Renaud’s. There we shall collect Marcelle and Suzanne. I fancy a little trip to the country will do us all good; and in your prayers do not forget to thank our good benefactor, M. Souvestre.”

“In short,” concluded Charlot, beaming upon me as I sat attentive to his amazing tale, “I am sure M. Souvestre, looking down from above, must have enjoyed the manner in which we spent his legacy. I fancy, however, M. Coupeau has cursed him many times since.”

“Coupeau. I fail to see where he comes in. Where does he figure in this story of yours.”

“Oh, him!” said Charlot blithely. “His downfall can be traced back to the francs of M. Souvestre. Without them our little party would not have gone to stay at a little hotel at Poissy, and if we had not gone there Marcelle would not have met Coupeau, who was stopping there. The ungrateful hussy skipped with Coupeau, ran through his saving in a year, and destroyed his prodigality of words. What I give him is no charity, my friend, it is payment for having released me from one of the bonds of Bohemia which might have in time fettered me to poverty forever.”

## THE KEY TO THE PAST

**H**E wrote his memories with eager zest,  
And said: “I have them fast—may live again  
Each joy if I but read!” He read in vain;  
The words were but chirography, no more;  
Rekindled naught to life. Then he forbore,  
Left his dim chamber, put away despair,  
And sought the open. Lo, through sunlit air  
His happy past flew homing to his breast!

Grace H. Boutelle,

# The Progress of J. Bunyan

by Stephen Chalmers

Author of "The Bronze Helmet," etc.

## WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

A TROOPER in Cromwell's army, Hallam Brooke, who tells the story, saved Mistress Joyce Eveleigh, attainted as a witch, from Jonas Slythey, dissident preacher, and a mob of villagers.

In this he was aided by one Hobgoblin Jack Bunyan, a tinker by trade, and Brooke's companion in arms, a mighty man of his inches whose imagination, however, had made of him a religious fanatic. Following his onslaught on the mob, Hobgoblin had exposed Slythey as a hypocrite and a renegade. Accompanying Mistress Eveleigh was Ruth Pryme, in whom Bunyan was interested, an "angel," as he had characterized her to Brooke.

Then, following the battle of Naseby and the defeat and flight of the king, Brooke was amazed to find his new-found friend in jail for swearing. And when Giles Bombard, the captain of the troop, had wrestled with Bunyan in prayer to no avail, an exorcist was called in, who proved to be none other than Slythey.

Bunyan, however, did not recognize him, but, submitting to his ministrations, was made deathly sick by a noxious dose which he swallowed at the exorcist's order. Then, for the first time, recognizing his tormentor, Hobgoblin emitted a mighty roar. Giles Bombard was flung violently against the opposite wall, hurled by Bunyan's mighty arms. Then, meeting no willing obstacle from Brooke, Bunyan sprang at the exorcist's throat with a bellow that must have sprung from the Roaring Devil, which could not be cast out.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BEAST FROM EPHESUS.

"**H**O, ye painted hypocrite!" Bunyan roared, bearing Slythey to the floor with him. "Ye shedskin lizard—'tis thou!"

And then the cell saw a mêlée which flung up the accumulated dust of years, a mêlée of flail-like arms threshing a squirming person who shrieked for mercy.

Giles, recovering from the shock of striking the wall (which had momentarily stunned him), made a dash for the door and the alley. Down the latter he roared:

"Ho!—the guard! Here!—Help! The guard!"

As for me, I leaned against the wall, laughing most immoderately, and shouting encouragement to Hobgoblin.

"At him, Jack! Pound him, Jack! 'Tis your chance, Jack! Remember the angel he stoned!"

Hobgoblin had executed a great measure of punishment—and might indeed have killed the hypocrite—before Bombard came rushing back, followed by the sentry from the alley and the guards from the outer door. They tore Hobgoblin from the bruised object on the floor. Slythey, his clothes gray with dust, his nose bleeding, his whole face a motley of discoloring, staggered to his feet and rushed from the cell, down the alley, and out of the lock-up, crying:

"Heaven help me! Help me! 'Tis no possession, but the Dark One himself! Help! Help! Help—"

The outer door slammed on the last wild appeal. I turned to behold Jack Bunyan

backed defiantly against the wall, his feet surrounded by burning sticks and live coals. The air was thick with smoke and dust. The guards stood amazed, waiting instructions from Captain Bombard, who sorrowfully shook his head:

"Ah, lad, lad!" he sighed. "Thou art in evil case. I leave thee to thine own reflections."

With such acknowledgment of defeat he ordered us all out, himself withdrawing and locking the cell door after him. Turning to me, he said:

"Do ye Trooper Brooke stand guard over him. Mayhap, as y're friend, ye may help him to better thinking."

So I spent the rest of that night sitting on a stool outside Jack Bunyan's cell. I tried to engage him in conversation, but he refused to engage, applying himself gloomily to his book or falling into long spells of brooding reverie.

Toward morning I dozed on my stool, but was awakened just as dawn began to steal through the prison alley, by a touch of Jack's big hand through the bars.

"Lad," said he, with ponderous solemnity, "I have reasoned all through the night, and to this conclusion have I come:

"Rather do I wish there were no Hell, or I were one of the devils in it. For mark ye, Master Innocent: 'tis human to wish one might be a tormentor rather than one of the tormented."

I tried to cheer him with the reminder that in another hour his twelve-pen'orth of confinement would be at an end.

"And then, friend Jack," I said, "it may be by this time there is a stewpan in need of tinkering at Eveleigh Manor."

"Aye, aye," said he, brightening somewhat. "And I shall see the angel again. And ye will be my company, lad, lest again I fall by the wayside?"

"That I shall, Jack!" I said, "for I would profit much by further sight of the angel myself."

It was not that morning after all, but on the second after Jack's release from durancé, that we paid our oft-postponed visit to Eveleigh Manor.

In the meantime we troopers were en-

gaged in a king-hunt. Manchester and Essex, the earls who had previously commanded the Parliamentary army, had been deposed in favor of Fairfax and Cromwell because the policy of the two lords had been, not to crush Charles absolutely, but merely bring him to reason by a demonstration of force.

This weak policy had been disastrous, contributing in considerable measure to successive royalist victories. Fairfax and Cromwell, backed at last by Parliament, had determined not only to smash Charles's forces (as they had done at Naseby), but capture the person of the king himself and bring him not so much to reason, as to trial as a traitor to his own realm.

This determination was the more iron bound when, in the rout after Naseby, the king's baggage was captured, and it was discovered, from numerous documents seized, that he had been double-dealing not only with friend and enemy at home, but with England's foes abroad. The welfare of England apparently was second to the safety of his skin and the saving of his crown, together with the "divine" prerogatives of the latter.

So, during the next few days we were kept scouring in all directions to the north and west for tidings of the king. But in the confusion after Naseby there was no certainty of the direction the fugitive monarch had taken. That he was reported to have been in several far apart places at the same time, proved that no one likely to inform, knew where he was.

The second morning after Hobgoblin's release from the guardhouse found us both off duty for a few hours and at the same time. Whereupon we seized our opportunity and repaired to the kitchen door of Eveleigh Manor.

In response to Jack's rather timid knock the door was opened by an old serving-man who was white-haired and not without a certain gentle dignity for one of his probable station in life. He must have been nearly seventy years old. At sight of our Roundhead dress he stiffened up and his eye greeted us in no friendly fashion.

"Your business with this house?" he asked sharply, but not discourteously.

Jack explained.

"I be a tinker by trade," said he; "John Bunyan, of Elstow in Bedford. Belike I am known to Mistress Prynne, who serves her ladyship. This lad is a beginner, assisting me, so to speak."

"Three days ago," continued Jack, having compromised the truth about me, "it was our blessed fortune to serve in a small way the ladies of this house. Afterward, Mistress Prynne having mind of me and my trade, I did promise to pay my respects and see what leaky vessels might be in need of repair."

Ah, Jack! That last was skilful, even if thy conscience *did* squirm.

The old man looked friendlier on the instant. No doubt he knew only too well of that affair in which his late master's daughter was so imperiled. But he still observed caution, disliking our dress I could see. He stood in thought a while, eying us dubiously but not unkindly; then said abruptly:

"You will remain where you are, please."

He closed the door in our faces and went off to confer, I suppose, with his mistress. When the door was opened again it was by Ruth Prynne. In the absence of her mistress she was less diffident. She greeted us both with a merry smile, and gave Jack Bunyan her two hands, as if they were old friends re-united.

"A fair day to thee, Master Bunyan—and thou, Master—"

"Brooke," I supplied; "Hallam Brooke—your servant, Mistress Prynne."

"Brooke," she repeated; "Hallam Brooke"; as if making a careful note of the name for some purpose.

"Indeed I am glad to see thee, Master Bunyan," she resumed, averting her eyes from me rather quickly, "though not half so glad as when ye did appear to succor my mistress in her grievous plight. Not," she amended, turning again to me, "that we were without a champion, and my lady Joyce is indeed grateful to thee, Master—Hallam Brooke."

"Then I am more than rewarded for a broken head," I said; and it was no mere pretty speech.

"But marry, Jack Bunyan! What ha' delayed thee?" she went with a light railing aimed at Hobgoblin. "Taking thy word as a thinker who was wont to be prompt in other days, I did set aside two jam-pans, a girdle with a broken hoop, and a kettle burned through; and the use of these we ha' been denied these two days, for that each hour we expected ye would require them to mend."

"Mistress Ruth," said Jack simply, "to tell truth to thee, before whom I can invent no deceit—I ha' been in gaol."

"In gaol!" she cried. The Puritan maid's mouth-corners twitched, and she was hard put to it, as was I, to keep from laughing outright. "What hast done now?"

"I was profane," said Bunyan, his head bowed in real remorse before his angel.

The angel's mouth twitched again and she flashed at me an understanding look, quick with suppressed mirth.

"Ah, Jack, Jack! Wilt ever learn to curb that tongue? Thou grievest me, Master Bunyan. Even while my heart thanked thee on the village green thy words were like hot brands upon my ears."

"Then, by the Archangel Gabriel, I will never swear again!" cried Hobgoblin. "By the two gods of London Town, great Gog and Magog, I swear it!"

"Swear not lest ye swear, Master John," said Ruth. "But prithee—a moment while I fetch the pans."

Leaving the door open, but us inside it, she ran back into the house. In a few moments she returned laden with jam-pans, a girdle, and a kettle. These the tinker-trooper took from her and made a serious pretense of examining.

"Eh, but they are in sad case," said he, shaking his head. And squatting down upon the ground he proceeded to study them one by one.

As his purpose was clearly (to me) to prolong the interview as much as possible, I, who had some hope to catch another glimpse of my own angel, squatted down beside him. Taking up the kettle, I examined the hole in it with a grave prentice eye.

"Didst bring the acid, boy?" Bunyan sternly asked me.

"Nay, master—I forgot," said I.

"Th' art a dolt!" cried Tinker Jack. "How think ye solder will hold an we ha' no acid? Mistress Prynne, I pray patience with this lad. He hath little experience, either with pots or living. Yet will I say well for him that at Naseby he did fight like a man."

"Even as might be looked for in him," said a voice that made my heart give such a leap that I dropped the kettle and sprang to my feet, my two hands instantly baring my head of its iron morion.

There she stood, my Lady Joyce Eveleigh, in the kitchen doorway, so fair in its plain framing. Her eyes were upon me with a grateful condescending, but only for a moment. Then she turned to Bunyan, who had his nose close to one of the jampans.

"And what think ye of the vessels, Master—"

"Bunyan," supplied Ruth; "John Bunyan and Master Brooke—Master Hallam Brooke, milady—his apprentice tinker."

I thought the lady's eyes twinkled at this, but she gravely repeated her question about the vessels. Did Master Bunyan think they were worth repairing? As she said it she drew her skirts carefully about her and seated herself on the doorstep as if she were no grand lady, even making a place for Ruth and bidding her by a gesture sit beside her.

So there we were, Hobgoblin and his apprentice, squatted on the ground, facing our two angels who were seated on the doorstep, while within, in the background, hovered the old serving-man, his aged face touched with amusement and not a little surprise and anxiety at his lady's condescension to two tinkers and—worse than that in his opinion—Roundheads!

"As to the worthiness of repair," said Tinker Bunyan, lifting his eyes from the jam-pan, "that which can be repaired is ever worthy of repair, sweet mistress, even as such poor human vessels as have fallen into disorder. For mark ye, ladies, we are all leaky vessels, some more and some less, but all badly in need of mending. Our usefulness may be impaired, but never at an end until we are thrown into the dis-

card, which is the scrapheap for stewpans and for us poor human vessels—the grave.

"And who knows, sweet ladies, what further use beyond? For even old iron hath its values, and may in a future-melted state be recast to new fine metal."

"Indeed, here is a philosopher!" cried Mistress Joyce, while Ruth's eyes shone proudly of her acquaintance from Elstow, flashing up at her mistress for that sign of approval which was not lacking. "What think you, Master—Apprentice?"

"I think, sweet mistress lady," I said, "that if I had my master's tongue, I might aspire to win whatever I set my heart upon in this world."

"Well spoken, indeed, Master Apprentice in sooth—a pretty speech!" she said, with a touch of banter and a glance which told me plainly she was not a whit deceived by my humble tinker pretension.

It was a pleasant interlude we spent at the kitchen door of Eveleigh Manor. From casual references I gathered that she—Mistress Joyce, of course—was the only child of Sir William Eveleigh, who had fallen on the king's side at Marston Moor. She lived alone, except for old Henry Falconer, who had served her father—aye, her father's father—and Ruth Prynne, who was half-maid and the rest companion; for I could see that on the side of the mistress there was a genuine love for the Puritan maid, and that Ruth worshipped my lady even as John his angel.

Apparently, Mistress Joyce was not unaware of something interesting in the relationship of John Bunyan and Ruth Prynne, and this knowledge she shared with me in the language of glances while Hobgoblin rambled on in his own peculiar way, mixing heaven and earth, leaky vessels and erring humanity in apt if sometimes twisted similes.

Mistress Joyce would frequently glance at me while he talked, sometimes drawing my attention with a swift twinkle to the open admiration of Ruth for her friend's pointed eloquence, again flashing an amused message as if she knew I was no tinker's apprentice, but a person of fair birth who could appreciate the humor of Jack's naive

simplicity and earnestness in great matters which were at this time too high for him.

As for the maid, I took more note of her because Mistress Joyce's signaling glances compelled me to. Ruth Prynne was in contrast with her mistress; not so tall and not so slight, lacking also that poise and indefinable dignity which marks the lady of fine birth and gentle training.

' My lady was fair as a lily and like that in slender grace, with small, fine features and hair which made me think sunlight lingered in its gold coils even when she stood in shadow. Ruth, by contrast, was robust, red-cheeked, and her hair was of a dark brown deepening almost to blackness.

In the end, when Tinker Bunyan could delay no longer (in honor to his craft) his verdict on the leaky vessels, he did the next best thing so that we might again have excuse to visit the kitchen door of Eveleigh Manor.

"Mistress," said he, "this prentice of mine having forgot the acid wherewith to do the work proper, my brand and solder avail not at present. I must even—"

"But, master," I protested, "ye did not bid me fetch the brand and solder!"

"What, dolt! Didst forget these also? I have a mind to cancel thy prentice articles!

"Lady," Bunyan added in apology to Mistress Joyce, whose eyes were moistly bright with mirth, "I must crave indulgence for this lad. He is young and without practical experience in good tinkering. I must even then take away the pans, with thy permission, and I do promise on my honor as a tinker to return them duly mended on the morrow, granted that these duties which at present first claim our—"

A little quick gasp came from Mistress Joyce's lips. Jack cut his speech short. We, all three—that is, Ruth, too—looked up in alarm. My lady's face was pale, and she was staring in the direction of the wall of the kitchen-garden.

Swiftly my glance followed the line of her vision. There was an elm-tree outside the wall, and its branches overhung on the garden side.

For a moment so brief that I might well have been mistaken, I saw a face peering through the thick June foliage. It vanished

almost instantly; but the face was the face of Jonas Slythey. That it was no trick of my imagination was evident in the expression on Jack Bunyan's countenance and my lady's agitation, and the fact that the face I had seen was more or less discolored and had a half-healed black eye.

I did not stop to wonder why the sight of any man's face should so startle Mistress Joyce, save that she must have been surprised and alarmed at the manner of the apparition. Springing to my feet, I ran to the wall, climbed to its parapet, and peered up into the tree.

There was no one there. Slythey—if it was indeed he—had made his escape. The road to Naseby ran behind the wall, and was flanked on the far side by thick willows bordering a small trout stream. No doubt the spying intruder had dropped from the tree, taken cover, and made his retreat behind the willow belt.

Puzzled by the incident, I returned to the kitchen door to report. Mistress Joyce had retired within, and Jack Bunyan was plying a rather set-lipped Ruth with questions concerning Jonas Slythey's apparent ill-will against the lady of the manor and his reasons for spying upon the house.

But Ruth's lips were closed in a firm, thin line. She merely hinted that "there were things she could speak of to no man," whatever she may have meant by that. I could see that if Trooper Bunyan was to continue in her good favor he had better desist; which he did presently, consoled no doubt by the thought that he had an excuse to return on the morrow.

Laden with the pans, we returned to camp, Hobgoblin pausing on the way through Naseby Village to borrow soldering material and a brand from a fellow tinsmith. But on the road we discussed Master Slythey and his latest appearance.

"He is surely an emissary of antichrist," declared John, naturally concluding, as was his way, that where the Hand of Providence was stirring a pot Satan was also at work to spoil the broth, if possible. "But what think ye the secret is, Master Wisehead?"

"I know not," I confessed, "save this—that milady holds the man in fear as well as despising."

"The man is a beast from Ephesus," said Bunyan, after due reflection; "and, mark ye, lad, we shall yet wrestle with him."

Slythey must have made good time from the wall, if indeed he had ever been there. Our surprise over his appearance in the tree was equalled, although our delight was greatly more, when we saw him again as we entered the Parliamentary camp.

Surrounded on three sides by a squad of Roundheads commanded by Sergeant Okey was Master Jonas Slythey, his black eye half-healed and the rest of his face discolored just as I had seen it in the tree. He was being marched in the direction of Cromwell's quarters; and clearly he was under arrest!

"Truly," said Hobgoblin Jack Bunyan, knowing no more of the circumstances than I did, and as we both saw. "Truly the Lord is on our side!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SERPENT WORMS.

THAT evening, after five or six hours at the continued fruitless game of king-hunting, we mended the leaky vessels. That is to say, Tinker Bunyan did the mending while I sat by, in order that John's conscience might be appeased, tending the fire and handing him the solder, acid, brand, and this and that, as a good apprentice might observe his master required them.

"Truly y're in a fair way to be a good tinker, Master Brooke," said Bunyan, while the acrid fumes from his operations set me coughing. "But y're not indeed of the craft until—"

He stopped short and looked about him in search of something of which he was apparently in great and immediate need.

"The crystal-chafer," he muttered. "Where—now we be in a blind alley with but one door to our dilemma. The key to unlock it is the crystal-chafer. Dolt, that I should ha' forgot it! But as thou'rt a good lad and a willing apprentice, Master Brooke, run ye back to that tinsmith of whom I did borrow the brand. Say to him y're my apprentice, and Master Bunyan's respects, and will he lend you his

crystal-chafer, which ye will surely return speedily."

Glad to be of some real prentice service, I trotted off through the village to the tinsmith's shop. As it was past tradesman's hours the shop was locked up, but being diligent and having an inquiring tongue I soon found where Master Lapham lived. Presently I was at his door.

His good wife responded to my summons, and curiously asked my business with her man out of tinkering hours. I explained that I was prentice to Master Bunyan, and had come to beg the use of Master Lapham's crystal-chafer.

"His what?" cried the good wife, clearly as ignorant as I of the nature of the required implement.

"The crystal-chafer, mistress," I repeated dutifully.

She went back into the house, and I heard her talking with her man, who presently came to the door with a queer expression on his wizen, homely face. He was a little, dried-up man. He recognized me at once as the lad who had accompanied Bunyan when that tinker trooper borrowed the solder and brand.

"Y're his apprentice?" he inquired.

"That I be, master," said I humbly.

"Since how long?"

"Since but this morning, master," I replied, seeing no harm in this simple truth.

"And ye want my crystal-chafer?"

"Aye, sir, an' it please ye."

He looked me over very thoughtfully, very respectful, I thought, of my size and shoulder-breadth, for I was as large for my years as Master Lapham was small for his. He suddenly pointed over my shoulder and said:

"Ye see yon gable over the sign of the three blue angels?"

I turned and looked where he pointed. Even as I did so I received to my great indignation and astonishment, a right hearty kick which sent me staggering and came nigh to upsetting me.

Recovering from shock and amazement, but with my indignation blazing into a rage for revenge, I turned to resent the treacherous attack in more honest kind. But I caught only a glimpse of Master Lapham

almost doubled up with mirth as he slammed the door shut and barred it from within.

Furiously I hammered on the door with both fists, and called the tinsmith forth with many a hot challenge to his manhood. But he only brayed asininely behind the door, and advised me to seek the " crystal-chafer " elsewhere.

I decided that dignity would best be served by biding some later opportunity to cry quits with the tinsmith. It was in high dudgeon, however, that I returned to quarters, determined to relate the matter to Master Bunyan and have his opinion on Master Lapham's conduct.

Hobgoblin I found tinkering the pans. He listened to my recital and then said with great satisfaction:

" 'Tis well, Master Prentice. Now art thou indeed of the craft, duly initiated by the crystal-chafer, which is a common instrument, but needful in the making of a good apprentice."

As I stared at him, realization dawning of the trick which had been played on me, my face—I am sure—flushing and paling while I was tossed between anger and a desire to laugh, Tinker Bunyan suddenly dropped his pan and brand together with a metallic crash, fell over on his back, and roared like a hilarious Falstaff.

By way of relieving mixed feelings, combining the desire to do violence while appearing to take his jest in good part, I descended upon Hobgoblin with my whole weight and strength. Next instant we were the center of a mêlée of pots and pans, while our roars in horse-play must have sounded throughout the camp.

It was Sergeant Okey who, hastening to the scene of disturbance, dragged us apart. Learning what the matter was, Okey wagged a finger at Bunyan and said reprovingly:

" It would behoove thee better, Trooper Bunyan, to conduct thee for a space in more seemly manner. Th'art scarce out of the guardhouse, and but for our good captain, the honest Bombard, this night might ha' seen thee in limbo again. Thy misdoings ha' come to the ears of Noll himself!"

" *Noll?*" gasped Bunyan.

" Aye, Noll—Oliver Cromwell, sir!" said Sergeant Okey, his right hand executing an involuntary salute. " Now that he hath won his way with Parliament, he would root out drunkards, gamblers, and swearers in vain from his army, and thy name as a chief offender hath come to his ears through one, Master Slythey, who is this day in Noll's appointment as a spiritual captain to our division. But for honest Captain Bombard, who hath hope for thy redemption, Bunyan—"

" Hold!" cried Hobgoblin, flashing a glance at me and starting to his feet. " Let us ha' this from the beginning. Master Slythey, ye say? A spiritual captain! But we did see him with our own eyes—under arrest!"

" Ah, thereby hangs a tale, Master Bunyan, which did surprise me even as it do you," said Gossip Okey with much relish. " 'Twas in this fashion—though I come by the tale second-hand through Captain Giles, who was present and served thee in good manner."

Okey, who loved to clatter a tale as well as any good wife in the real, squatted down and wetted his lips, preparing to unfold. When we, too, were settled he began:

" 'Twas in this fashion, as I say—it coming to the ears of our captain how this Master Slythey did usurp the law's authority in that he apprehended a fair lady for witchcraft and did incite the townsfolk to duck her in the pond, our honest Giles had him seized and brought before Noll, inasmuch as the matter were passing serious."

I felt secretly elated that thus Captain Bombard had acted on the information I gave him, although at the time it was to assist Jack rather than to accuse Slythey.

" 'Tis only by hearsay do I know what passed between the man and old Noll," Okey went on; " but our captain do say that Noll was greatly angered, and but for the preacher's cloth was half a mind to hang Master Jonas Slythey for usurping authority in these parlous times.

" But this Master Slythey hath a clever wit, like to the serpent's, and he did somehow worm himself into Noll's bosom and interest. At least, so saith Giles, but for myself I think that Cromwell is no fool to

be gulled by any man's tongue, and that he do secretly hope to make use of the man.

"Be that as it may be, in the end he did berate this Slythey for his actions, censoring him for that very intolerance against which we fight, and especial for carrying such measures against a fair woman, and that without due authority and process of law, yet commanding his loyalty and zeal, though he carried it too far.

"Noll, so saith Bombard, decided to keep the man and his abilities under his own eye and control, perhaps weighing—and this is what I myself do think—perhaps weighing the man's uses as a spy and a tale-bearer, such as is needful in times of war.

"For, mark ye this—and there is where Trooper Bunyan comes into the matter—Noll would indeed make a new model of his army, and root out the ungodly from our ranks. Knowing this, and, I ha' no doubt, seeking to curry further favor, this Master Slythey did speak of one, John Bunyan, as the chiefest among the Philistines, and did also speak of thy comrade, Master Brooke, as a youth defiled by such companionship, and already turned to swearing and other sinfulness by example."

"Alas, 'tis true!" groaned Hobgoblin, bowing his head over the jam-pan.

"At this hearing," Okey continued, pleased with the effect of his narrative, "Noll's brow grew dark as a thunder-cloud—so Giles did tell me. But 'twas good Giles Bombard who spoke a word on thy behalf, Bunyan, saying ye were a doughty soldier, and that ye did wax profane only in moments of great stress.

"But here Master Slythey made mention that 'twas this same profane braggart who did play 'Sweet William' on the bells consecrated to sound only the glory of God; whereat Noll's brow darkened again. But Giles, eager for thy redemption, said that Trooper Bunyan had been inspired to ring the bells only by a desire to give glory to Heaven for our great victory, and had not stayed to choose a tune, thinking indeed 'twas the Doxology he played, and further that Trooper Bunyan had suffered twelve hours in durance for swearing on the field of battle, even as Master Slythey had knowledge,

mentioning the trial to cast out thy devil, Master Bunyan.

"And then, Giles do say, old Noll did a'most smile, and ask many questions anent the exorcism, and, saith Giles, come as nigh laughing as any man ever saw Noll Cromwell. When he heard of the strange manifestations of thy devil, Bunyan, he nodded his head and said:

"Aye, on the field of Naseby I did mark the man and his red hair, which goeth well with a russet coat. Yet, if he prays as well as he fights, the heat of youth will depart from his hair as it grays with years and wisdom. Let me hear no worse of Trooper Bunyan."

"Said he so—Noll Cromwell!" cried Hobgoblin, radiant with joy.

"And then," said Okey, frowning at the interruption, "he did dismiss our captain and were closeted for some time with this Master Slythey, who anon came from the general's quarters with the air of one well satisfied with the outcome.

"That is all," concluded the Gossip Okey, looking at Bunyan as if to say: "Now ye may interrupt."

Hobgoblin was silent a while, glowering in deep thought at the half-mended pans, but chuckling ever and anon. Presently he raised his eyes to mine.

"What think ye, Master Wisehead?"

"Tis a strange tale," said I, whereat Sergeant Okey beamed with self-satisfaction.

"Th'art right, sergeant," said Bunyan suddenly. "The man is as ye say—a sarpint! But Noll Cromwell hath an eye for evil as well as good, and the shrewdness to avail himself of the latter and turn the former to advantage.

"A spiritual comforter—ha!" Hobgoblin growled. "Nay, nay! More likely thief of our secrets than keeper of our consciences. But it behooves us, as our good sergeant advises, to mend our ways lest we trip upon snares of Master Slythey's setting."

"Boy!" he added, turning solemnly to me. "Now that we ha' the crystal-chafer, let us on with our mending."

Well, after Okey's departure we put the finishing touches to the kettle, girdle and

jam pans, while we discussed in low voices the queer promotion of Master Jonas Slythey. What it meant—save as we suspected the man was being used as a spy in the guise of a preacher—we knew not, particularly in what way his spying might affect Eveleigh Manor and our angels, one of whom was an openly avowed royalist.

We decided to inform Mistress Eveleigh and Ruth of what had taken place, again urge them to tell us frankly if there was any reason which might justify Master Slythey's spying upon the house, and at the same time warn them to caution.

And next day, the moment we were temporarily relieved from duty, we hied to the kitchen door, carrying the mended pans, which clanked cheerily against our steel armor.

We knocked at the door; and my heart, at least, beat high in expectation of the vision reappearing.

But it was Ruth Prynne who opened the door, and that only wide enough to admit the mended vessels. She did not look at us. Her face was pale and perturbed, and her lips set in a thin line which plainly hinted that any speech would be unwelcome.

She merely took the vessels, set them on the floor behind her, handed something to Tinker Bunyan, and shut the door in our faces without uttering a single word.

I stared at Bunyan. He was staring at the palm of his hand, where lay a shilling piece.

"Truly," said John, "the ways of God are inscrutable!"

We were both very crestfallen after all our happy expectations. But there was nothing we could do. The shut door frowned forbiddingly at us, and all was silent within, although I was somehow conscious that eyes were observing us from the windows.

Slowly we turned away and went back to camp, for the greater part of the way speechless with astonishment. Occasionally John stopped, stared at the shilling, and muttered again about the inscrutable ways of Providence.

"Inscrutable, indeed," said I, for the sake of saying something; whereupon Bunyan contradicted me—and himself—as was

ever his way when any one wholly agreed with him, and so left no room for argument.

"Nay, Master Innocent! Not so inscrutable," said he. "This is some subtlety of Heaven to offset the machinations of the devil and his agent, Slythey. Mark ye, youth, so 'twill develop."

I could not follow his reasoning, but he appeared quite confident that he was right, all things to him being governed by two supernatural agencies involved in an eternal tug o' war for victory. In this case good was represented—to John Bunyan—by Ruth Prynne, evil by Jonas Slythey.

I only thought that possibly he was in error about the identity of the celestial figure.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A VISITOR SURPRISED.

ONCE more the fruitless king-hunt. Charles was still supposed to be in hiding somewhere between Naseby and Chester. While it seemed beyond all effort to rout the fox from his earth, Cromwell was at least seeing to it that he should be cut off from joining his sympathizers in Wales.

Our general lingered in Nottinghamshire—that is, in the vicinity of Naseby—and delayed his ultimate southerly march, which Fairfax had already made, to assist the commander-in-chief in the subjugation of the counties south and west.

In the mean time, when we were not king-hunting, Hobgoblin and I discussed ways and means of again seeing our respective angels, Mistress Joyce Eveleigh and Ruth Prynne.

Unfortunately for us we had no excuse for presenting ourselves again at the kitchen door on the pretense of tinkering. Our last reception there had dampened our enterprising with the solder and brand. There seemed also little chance of encountering the lady and her maid without the walls of the garden, for out of the gateway of Eveleigh Manor neither of them had visibly walked since the affair of the duck-pond, although I have no doubt Ruth or old Henry Falconer made quiet visits to the village for food supplies.

Undoubtedly the household had at least one friend and sympathizer in the village. If we could only have discovered the identity of that person Jack might have sent some message to Ruth. But, as it turned out, it was Ruth who first sent a message to her friend and admirer, Tinker Bunyan.

It fell a day less than a week after our repulse at the kitchen door. Dismounting from my horse after a hard ride on a false scent, I observed a figure which was somehow familiar to me, standing in a kind of uncertain, hesitating attitude at the edge of the camp. At a second glance I recognized Master Lapham, the tinsmith.

He was looking hither and thither, divided as to which course he should take, apparently. In his hands he nervously twisted a folded piece of paper. His eyes fell on me presently and, to my delight, he failed to recognize Bunyan's apprentice in the trooper in cuirass and morion and grimed with the sweat and dust of the morning's hard ride.

To me, as a bird to the fowler's net, he came, all unsuspecting of danger.

"Good sir," said he timorously, "will ye direct me whither I may find Trooper Bunyan who, outside of his soldiering, is a tinker by trade?"

"Meaning," said I, "that he is soldering when not soldiering?"

At this play upon words Master Lapham's sense of humor overcame him completely. He fairly doubled up. Thinking, perhaps, that it was unseemly to laugh directly in my face, he turned his back upon me and again bent himself double with mirth.

The temptation was too great for frail flesh. I let him have the whole weight and force of the "crystal chafer" within my right jackboot. He collapsed with a howl of surprise, pain and indignation.

Presently, sitting on the ground, he recognized me. I will say for the man's sense of fairness that he began laughing again and laughed until the tears came.

"And I get up," said he at last, "wilt consider us quits, Master Prentice?"

"Aye—quits!" said I. "The crystal-chafer I received hath been returned. But what would ye with Master Bunyan?"

"If thy name is Brooke, Master Prentice—"

"Aye—Hallam Brooke, Master Tinsmith."

"Then 'tis well met we be," said he, scrambling to his feet and handing me the bit of folded twisted paper. "She said, and I found not Master Bunyan, his friend, Master Brooke, could be trusted. I like not myself to enter there among these men of blood," he added, rubbing the portion of his body where my boot had smitten him.

My heart beat with expectation. *She* had said that I could be trusted if Bunyan was not to be found. True, I would rather it had been that Bunyan could be trusted if I—however, the paper, upon examination, was addressed to Master J. Bunyan.

Thanking the tinsmith, I hurried in search of Hobgoblin, whom I found in our quarters divesting himself of his cuirass. He seized the paper eagerly and studied the inscription.

"'Tis her own hand!" he said jubilantly.

"Whose?" I whispered.

"The angel's!" was all the satisfaction I got, save that I was relieved to think it must be Ruth who had placed my trustworthiness second to Bunyan's.

And Ruth it was who had sent a message. It was written in a fair hand, and John had no difficulty in reading, for he and the maid had learned together at Bedford grammar school which, as you must know, was founded by a Lord Mayor of London in the time of Queen Mary. In his frank way—for Bunyan held no secrets from the world—he read out the message to me without even glancing first over its nature:

DEAR JACK:

I am much troubled these days, and I feare me somme greate mystery must fall uppon thee house. I have neede of thy helpe lest further yll befall me deare mystresse. Wilt thou, thenne, come to the summer-house which is in the garden of the manor, and watche there for me and my comyng? The houre I canne not sette, but I will come of a suretie.

Keepeth thy writyng a secret and telle no manne of thy comyng to the garden atte my askyng.

RUTH PRYNNE.

The last paragraph of this message was out before Bunyan realized that already he had betrayed the maid's confidence.

"But she said I could be trusted," I assured the crestfallen Jack, who had stopped short in the reading and was staring at me with comical dismay.

"Aye—well, 'tis done," said he resignedly. "But ye bear witness the sin was inadvertent."

"Born of thine own honest nature, Jack!" I declared.

"And maybe 'twas Heaven made my tongue slip," said Bunyan, "knowing, in the Great Wisdom, I might ha' need of a comrade's help against this further devil's work of which she makes hint."

I having agreed with him that the All-Wise surely had a hand in the game, he seemed much relieved and read the letter over again, this time very slowly, and insisting that I follow each word in case any hidden meaning escaped him.

Finding no other explanation for the message than appeared on its face, we at once decided upon the only course open to us—to repair at once to the manor garden. That is, we would both go there, but in case my known presence might discomfit Ruth it was agreed that while Jack approached the summer-house alone and awaited developments there, I should conceal myself where I could observe and be in readiness were assistance required.

As we were neither of us likely to be called to duty—for some hours, at least—we obtained permission to leave the camp, and started at once for Eveleigh Manor.

Before we came within sight of it on the Naseby-Sibbertoft Road, Hobgoblin separated from me after we again carefully rehearsed our agreements. While Jack continued up the road toward the back gate in the garden wall, I dropped behind the belt of willows of which I have made mention as hiding a small trout-stream from the road.

Along a faint anglers' path I made my way until I was opposite that point of the wall where the elm-tree stood and thrust its branches in over the garden.

As soon as I felt that Jack had had time to reach the summer-house, the position of which I remembered marking on our previous visits, I emerged from the willow belt, saw that the road was deserted, climbed

to the top of the wall, and swung myself to a place of observation among the overhanging limbs.

From this place of vantage I commanded the greater part of the manor gardens around the summer-house. The latter was situated a little to the left of the manor—that is, toward me. The gardens in front were of designed shrubbery and lawns. At the rear of the manor was the kitchen garden of vegetables through which a path led from the back-gate in the wall.

At the left side of the manor and around the summer-house there was what is called an "old-world" garden—a maze of little walks meandering through a disordered profusion of all kinds of flowers. Before the summer-house, which was a rustic structure, with a rough-hewn bench and a weather-worn table, stood a sun-dial, which told me the hour was one after noon.

Jack Bunyan was not in the summer-house yet, although he might have been there, for one angle of it was hidden from my direct vision. But he was not there, for presently I saw his red head emerge from a clump of wild-rose bushes directly behind the rustic house.

He peered intently at the manor and then all around the garden. No one was in sight, and probably he himself had reached thus far unobserved.

Satisfied that it was safe, he swiftly came from the rose-bushes and darted across the few yards of open space between his last cover and the summer-house. Around the little structure he stole, and made as if to dive into the shelter of the bower.

But then he suddenly halted at the very entrance, with a look on his face which was as eloquent of his astonishment as my own at what happened then, when Jack Bunyan, at least, got one of the greatest surprises of his life.

There was some one in the bower—a man who stepped swiftly out of the shade of that angle which had been hidden from my direct vision.

In his right hand he held a cocked horse-pistol, and he pointed it straight at Jack Bunyan's head. Yet the voice of the person behind the pistol was strangely in contrast with his menacing attitude.

"A fair day to you, Master Roundhead," said he, as pleasantly as he might have welcomed a beloved friend. "I prithee be seated."

"Only," he added, "be very, *very* careful."

## CHAPTER IX.

### A BONE OF CONTENTION.

I CONQUERED my first impulse to drop from the tree, take the stranger by surprise, and turn the tables in Bunyan's favor. But curiosity, and the fact that my friend seemed in no immediate danger of being shot by the courteous enemy, decided me to wait and see what should develop. Presently I might gain some explanation of the stranger's identity, and his presence in that summer-house, to which Hobgoblin had been invited—as to a trap, it seemed.

Yet I could not believe that Ruth, despite her loyalty to her mistress, could be so enamored of the cause Joyce espoused as to lay a trap for Jack Bunyan, Roundhead though he was. Which made the mystery deeper, and aggravated my curiosity respecting the gentleman.

Bunyan was quite at his mercy, although he did not appear to take his situation one way or another, being at first too much surprised, and then developing a sort of belligerently inquiring attitude not at all in keeping with his position.

"Who are you?" he demanded to know.

The stranger laughed lightly. Seeing that Bunyan had so little regard for his peril, he presently lowered the weapon, after once more suggesting that Jack be seated.

"Nay," said Hobgoblin. "I would as lief stand. I think and talk better having free use of my limbs. But ye do not answer. What is your name and station? What do ye in this garden? And why greet a visitor with a pistol-muzzle?"

The stranger laughed again as if highly amused.

"Ye usurp the prerogatives of the situation, sir," said he. "But so be it—for the present. I am Richard Eveleigh, an uncle-in-law of the lady of Eveleigh Manor."

So! I was immediately more interested, and developed a kindlier feeling regarding the gentleman. I even imagined on the instant a distinct family resemblance to Mistress Joyce, despite that his face was unshaven and his general appearance that of one who has recently undergone some hard knocks.

He was little over medium height, gracefully built, and dressed in cavalier (although not military) fashion, his attire undoubtedly of rich material, but the worse for wear. He wore no hat, and his hair, long and curling, was touched with gray, as were his mustache and a little tuft below his underlip. His age I judged to be about forty-five.

But that about the man which made him different from the common cavalier type was a curious commingling of dignity, good humor, and the air of one who does not take anything very seriously for very long. It was as if life were to him something of a jest which, like the needle in the haystack, only needs discovering. This shabby-genteel person with the horse-pistol struck me as a persistent hunter after the needle.

"So much for your name and station," said Bunyan. "But why the horse-pistol?"

"As to that," said Eveleigh, "by your dress I take it y're Roundhead, whereas I, by mine, would seem to any eye Cavalier, as indeed I am. That is, my sympathies are with the king."

"And ye fear seizure since Naseby," John supplied.

"Possibly, though I bore no arms at Naseby. Still, an unexpected Roundhead entering my niece's garden—"

"And why, if ye be of the king's side, bore ye no arms at Naseby?" Bunyan asked with a thoughtful frown.

Again Eveleigh seemed greatly amused, as I was myself at Hobgoblin's attitude, as if he and not this gentleman with the pistol were master of the situation.

"I am not a man of blood," said Joyce's uncle. "Rather do I incline to the gentler walks."

"Weak spine!" snorted Bunyan. "As a man has sympathy in these times he should bear arms on one side or the other, or be out of sympathy and arms on both

sides. The only weapon ye draw, then, is in behalf o' thine own skin?"

The twinkle in Richard Eveleigh's eyes became a fire of resentment. He tilted the point of the pistol which he had previously lowered.

"Be very careful, Master Roundhead!" said he. "My humor brooks no insolence from churls. Yet I make answer simply that I was not trained to violence."

"Neither have I heard aright, was thy brother, the late Sir William Eveleigh," said Bunyan scornfully. "Like thee, he was in sympathy with the king. Unlike thee, Master Weakspine, he fought for his king, and, they do tell me, laid down his life for him on Marston Moor."

Eveleigh's face became very pale at this taunt. His right arm stiffened, and the pistol was again leveled straight at Hobgoblin's face. I blamed myself for not having taken a hand in the matter while yet there was time. Now I dared not make an open move. Quicker than any action of mine would be the pressure of a finger on that trigger. All I could do was draw, cock and carefully aim my own pistol at Master Eveleigh's heart. But I could not hope that my bullet would reach him before his found Jack Bunyan, and I was loth to shoot Joyce's uncle without actual provocation.

"Be seated!" commanded Eveleigh, sighting along the pistol-barrel.

"Nay," said Bunyan stolidly. "I feel more of a man standing. But thy weapon frights me not, Master Weakspine. My trust is in the Lord. Thy pistol would miss fire or its ball miss me!"

For a few moments Eveleigh stared at the man, puzzled. Then he laughed, uncocked, and tossed the pistol on the weather-worn table at his right and said:

"Thou ranting predestinist! What can a man do against such? And I like not cold killing."

"Ranting predestinist!" growled Bunyan. "Ye speak as one without understanding. To my mind 'tis ranting liturgy is the abomination, such as ye do practise most like, who worship the Most High by rule, as if a man's soul as well as his tongue should be shaped in artifice. How shall a

man call his soul his own when the expression of every other man's is set forth for him by the king's law and writ down in a book!"

"How say ye?" Eveleigh queried sharply, himself appearing to forget the oddity of argument with a man he had but newly met and at whose head he had scarce done levelling a horse-pistol. "There you are wrong, my round-headed, narrow-brained friend. For mark ye, all men are not alike. Some ha' power to think and some ha' not. Thus 'tis the duty of a king and such as are his ministers to think for the unlettered and unversed of his realm."

"Then," said John naively, "'twere folly for dolts like me and my kind to do aught in the way of thinking, leaving the matter to them that make a profession of it. But by what right does a king so act? Granting that he may ha' control over our subject bodies, by what authority do he usurp God's sovereignty over a man's soul?"

"There is a divine right," said Eveleigh, "whereby a Christian king is, in his person, God's anointed minister over all those committed to his charge."

And then to my great amusement, interest and entertainment, these two oddly matched individuals entered into a most fervid argument on a variety of subjects—a chain of things, one linking on with the other. They waxed hot on kings, commoners, pomps, vanities, carnal sins, divine rights, people's rights, freedom of conscience, and the exercise of personal conviction.

Bunyan was, as his wont, thunderously argumentative; Eveleigh witty, and, as the debate went on, seeming to enjoy the encounter immensely.

In the battle of words Hobgoblin clearly forgot what he came for, and Eveleigh his first alarm at the appearance of a Roundhead in the privacy of that garden. But I had not forgotten anything. While I sat in that tree I was filled with a great curiosity to know by what strange circumstance, designed or accidental, these two had fallen together, and what the upshot would be.

Several questions kept recurring in my mind. Why had Ruth Prynne summoned

John Bunyan to the garden? Was she aware that he would meet this man and not herself? If so, to what purpose?

It would be rather far-fetched to believe that Mistress Joyce hoped, through Ruth Prynne, to convert Jack Bunyan to her religious and political sympathies in order that he might turn his physical arm to her service. If that had been the plan, then I also should have been included in the scheme of proselytizing. I laughed to myself, imagining John Bunyan apostate!

But that the encounter was accident, and a very serious one to the ladies of the manor, became clear when presently I saw Ruth come from the house, glance to right and left, and run rapidly toward the rustic bower where John thundered and Eveleigh skilfully fenced with witty parry and caustic thrust.

For a moment she hid in the wild-rose bushes. Then she must have discovered that there was at least one other person besides John Bunyan in the summer-house. Her face, when she parted the bushes for an instant, was stamped with utter dismay and terror. Swiftly she let the parted bushes come together. As I did not see her retreat from them I knew that the argument now had an audience of two.

By this time Bunyan and Eveleigh had argued in a circle back to religious differences.

I could not make up my mind what Eveleigh's views were. I doubt if he had any, or held any very seriously. Rather he seemed merely to delight in making fun of Bunyan's, ever taking the opposite side, even when he had to contradict things he had previously contended.

"If, then," thundered John, "there are questions in men's minds as to how, there being but one God, He doth wish His children to conduct themselves, how He would they should worship Him, should not His children do according to their own light and conviction?"

"Nay," said Eveleigh. "Then do we add chaos to confusion. There being such questions in men's minds it behooves such as have learning to decide and set forth agreements and manners of worship. For there be those who, half learned and taking

full license, would falsify God, deny His Son, even argue the Holy Scripture but one of many fables devised by ancient men.

"For, mark ye, Master Bigot, the Turk doth claim his Koran as good a scripture, and his Mahomet the only savior. And every race—Jews, Moors, and the swart Paynims—think their own deities and gospels the most righteous. So it behooves a king who hath his England's soul to save to decide these questions for his people, rather than have his subjects slitting each other's gizzards like Christian and Saracen, believer and infidel."

"As all England is doing at this hour," said John.

But then a kind of despair settled down upon him. He shook his great, red head gloomily, clasped his rugged hands behind his back, and began to stride back and forth before the summer-house. By his feverish pace I knew that that great imagination was again weighted with his "great burden" of doubt.

"Oh!" he groaned audibly "I am sorry Heaven created me a two-legged beast. Were I a thing of feathers, or fins, or wool, I had not a sinful nature to contend."

Eveleigh was eying him with quizzical amusement. But John seemed to have forgotten him for the moment, striding about with his chin on his breast, muttering to himself the while. Joyce's uncle, perceiving his abstraction, seized his opportunity. He picked up the pistol from the table, thrust it under his coat, and quietly slipped around the edge of the summer-house.

I saw him disappear among the rose-bushes as John's back was turned. For a moment I expected some outcry from Ruth. He must have stumbled upon her in hiding there. But no. The bushes stirred for a moment, and I thought I heard faint whispering. Then the bushes became still, and I did not see Joyce's uncle emerge from them either. He was there with Ruth Prynne, and Hobgoblin had the field all to himself.

For a few moments more John Bunyan strode up and down. Then he began to speak, without lifting his head.

"A two-legged beast—aye! Even to the very crows that perch upon the plow-

share is His mercy open. To the birds, four-legged beasts and fishes there is no fire or brimstone after death. They have no sinful natures. Why should Heaven's vengeance fall only on man?"

Suddenly he stopped and spun around upon the adversary he supposed to be still seated.

"But yet!" he trumpeted his new thought. "Tell me this: *Do fishes ha' the privilege of entering the kingdom?*"

I do not know how Master Eveleigh would have received this. I know that I buried my face in my arms on the tree-limb to smother my mirth, not so much at the odd question as at sight of Hobgoblin's face when he found himself thundering at thin air. His jaw dropped and the arm he had raised in eloquent challenge dropped to his side.

It was then—just as I was about to whisper: "In the roses, Jack!"—that Ruth Prynne's face appeared to him among the bushes. What she had planned to do, whether make her presence known or escape, I do not know.

Jack Bunyan saw her. He sprang forward, thrust his hands into the bushes and all but dragged her out by the shoulder. The bushes closed behind her and covered Master Eveleigh, a glimpse of whom I had caught crouching there behind her.

Ruth's face was very white and her manner distraught. I think now she was at a loss how to act, her one thought, perhaps, being to distract Bunyan from Richard Eveleigh.

As I have said, between meeting with Joyce's uncle and this moment, Bunyan had quiet forgotten that he came to the garden on tryst. Now he remembered.

"Ha! Ruth," he welcomed her. "Ye ha' been long on the way. But I whiled it in argument with some Master Cynic who crossed by path, and"—he looked around vaguely and passed a hand over his eyes—"I know not, lass, whether 'twas real or but some more of my imagining. It was as if I did wrastle with Antichrist."

"But what ails thee, Ruth?" suddenly noting her distract manner. "Why art so pale—and dumb?"

"Let me go! Oh, let me go!" she

pleaded, trying to withdraw from under the hand on her shoulder.

"Nay!" said he. "I will not let thee go unless thou tell me thy name. That is in the Book, Ruth, and it means: 'Show me thy true colors.' What ails thee? Why should ye run from Jack Bunyan? Ye did summon me here, saying ye had need o' me in trouble. Why? What trouble? For I would indeed serve thee, sweet lass."

She tried to pull herself together. She spoke, but in great confusion, one word contradicting another:

"Oh, Jack, I am in great trouble. I mean—it is nothing. That is—I ha' changed my mind, Master Bunyan. This is what I wished to say to thee. I—I only wished to say farewell to thee, dear Jack, until—until some happier time, when—"

Bunyan laid his other hand on her other shoulder and looked down into her eyes. Honest as the day himself in all his acts and words, he was wont to take another's statement literally. And in this case it might well be that the maid wished to meet him alone and bid him a temporary farewell until such time as John's affairs and her mistress's ceased to pull her in opposite directions.

"Until some happier time, lass," said he softly. "Then—then shall this poor Jacob be welcome in thy sight, Ruth? For oh, lass—"

His face became tenderly radiant. In that moment he was pliant in her hands. She stopped the fervid declaration he would have made by raising a little hand to his mouth. He seized her fingers and kissed them.

"And—I was to say for my mistress," she went on hurriedly, all blushing at the unaccustomed tribute; "I was to say that she is grateful to you and to master—Master Apprentice—for your aid against Master Slythey, but—but she cannot abide Roundheads—as Roundheads—and her—her uncle hates them all. So, Jack, ye see—"

"Eh! So it was her uncle, and no imagining of mine!" Bunyan interrupted. "As slippery as his tongue, by Magog! But he might hate this Roundhead more did Jack Bunyan do his duty and report him harboring at Eveleigh Ma—"

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried in great terror. "For my sake, dear Jack! Do ye not see, I would be to blame for bringing you, a Roundhead, into the sanctuary of this garden? You must not do it, Jack—dear Jack! You *will* not do it?"

Hobgoblin appeared to ponder the nice point, and seemed inclined to agree with her that his personal honor off duty was a thing outside his soldier honor on duty. As he still considered the point she began to draw him away from the summer-house and toward the back gate.

"And now, fare thee well, Jack Bunyan," she said. "When times are happier I—I will send thee word, Jack, and gladly make thee welcome. And see, dear lad"—she pulled from her bosom a little book which might have been twin to that other she had given him—"here is a keepsake, Jack. Promise me ye will read it diligently. 'Tis a means of grace and," with a little laugh, "I do think ye ha' need of some."

He took the volume from her hand. It was entitled, as I afterward knew, "The Practice of Piety." Jack kissed it, and made room for it in his capacious jackboot.

She was still urging him toward the gate. He went willingly enough, but as he passed

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

under the tree he made a downward motion with his right hand which satisfied me that his willingness had a double thought. Plainly that gesture said: "Wait!" Unsuspected in the tree, what I might learn would the sooner develop if he took his departure.

She saw him out through the gate, barred the latter after him, then came running back to the bower, out of which stepped Master Eveleigh.

"Is the dolt gone?" he asked, with a laugh.

I did not hear what Ruth said. She curtsied deeply, her head lowered.

"Then," said Joyce's uncle, "bid your sweet mistress to the garden. Say I await her in the bower."

As Ruth again curtsied and went hastily toward the house, Eveleigh reentered the bower, sat on the edge of the rustic table, and began to hum a lively air.

I, in the tree, waited with great expectancy. Presently I was to see the vision again. And from the meeting of Joyce and her uncle I hoped to learn something that would solve the mystery of Eveleigh Manor.

I did not feel that I was spying. My only thought was to serve my lady.

# What Fear Is

by

Peter Ward

MADAME DE STAËL was a clever woman—so clever that Napoleon sent her into exile. It was her habit to make airy epigrams under which lurked the sting of truth.

"I don't believe in ghosts," she said, "but I am afraid of them."

That was not the remark that drove her from Paris; *madame* coined phrases about the emperor which were as much to the point and as easy to remember. *Madame* saw that irrationality characterized fear—an irrationality which scientists from Pliny to Mosso have tried to explain away.

Pliny tested twenty of the bravest Roman gladiators and found that, although warned of what was coming, all but two, when menaced with a naked sword, winked. Darwin thought that fear was an important element in preserving the life of animals, but what could he say to that paralyzing terror which suspends all movement and makes the bird an easy prey to the serpent, or the killing of seals such an easy slaughter that it sickens even the most hardened hunters?

The average man recoils at the sight of a garter snake, but he can look unmoved at a test tube full of the deadliest germs. The born football player rarely makes a good man on the track for the reason that he has not the courage for the last grueling fifteen yards, and the track man rarely makes a good football player because he has not the courage for the shock of line bucking.

Many soldiers who could stand the terror of a trench raid were deadly afraid of rats. Women are constitutionally afraid of fire and heights; the average woman had rather live on the third floor of a tinder-built fire-trap than on the fifteenth floor of a modern fireproofed building.

Somewhere in each of us there is a cell stocked perhaps with memories of our own childhood or the childhood of the race—a loose nerve end which, when properly stimulated, leads to panic.

This is not an essay on fear; it is the story of how fear came to Jack Houston, and to sharpen the point of the narrative it must be proved that he was a brave man. It takes courage to revolt against authority in the British Merchant Marine, for those in authority are usually physically capable of defending themselves, and, in addition, the trade service is so closely allied with the navy that the tradition of unquestioning discipline is almost as strong in one as in the other. Although he was a small man, weighing perhaps one hundred and forty-five pounds in his sea clothes, Jack Houston had assaulted a mate who, in Houston's opinion, was mistreating Black Adam, a negro who had attached himself to Houston as a pilot fish attaches itself to a whale.

The mate, like most of his kind, was good in a rough-and-tumble, was armed, and weighed at least one hundred and eighty hard pounds. Force of numbers overcame Houston, and when the steamer Ulalume dropped her anchor a hundred miles up the Iriwadi, he and Black Adam went over the side under escort to face the charge of mutiny on the high seas.

Houston stuck his thumb in the mate's eye, whooped to Black Adam, dropped into the oily water, and struck out for shore with the bullets from the mate's pistol dropping about him and about the negro who followed him.

And now the mate had come ashore, routed out a limp European who passed as police officer, and with a trio of natives who fingered their muskets nervously, searched the village of Dasson for the two.

He combed the half hundred houses thoroughly, and limped finally to the dak bungalow which stands on the edge of the settlement with its back to the jungle.

Entering, the two men found Tony Dagon, the owner of this rustic hotel, clad in cotton pajamas and a flowered waist-coat, sitting before a table on which lay open a spelling primer.

"You speak the lingo," said the mate to the police officer. "Ask him if he has seen two men—one white and one black?"

"Pardon, sirs," lisped Tony Dagon, thumbing the leaves of his book, "I speak—I speak your lovely English. Anne has a dawg, Anne has a dawl. Anne loves her dawg, Anne loves her dawl." He pointed with some pride to the picture of Anne—a little girl in pantalettes, with her hair under a circle comb, a doll on her arm, and a terrier at her heels.

"To hell with Anne!" grunted the beefy mate, who wore a patch over one eye. "Education is the ruination of these black beggars. Ask him to tell you straight out if he has seen these two."

The limp police officer, whose mustache dripped wax in the heat, spoke to Tony Dagon in Burmese, and the latter, after an inward struggle in which he fingered the spelling book from one end to the other to find words, answered in the same language.

"Yes," said Tony Dagon, "two such

came here—one European and one kullah. They were hungry, sirs, and I gave them food; rather, they took it. They asked me how to get to Kettoree, and I said by water boat, but the European laughed like rain booming in a cistern and said he would go by land. I smiled then, sirs, for I knew he must be mad—that is a journey that no man has taken. Especially now that the monsoon is about to break."

The mate knew enough of the language to follow Tony Dagon.

"But they went?" he said.

"Yes, sirs, they took my water-bottle and what food there was, and the sword of my father who fought for King Thebaw."

"Damnation!" growled the mate, looking out toward the green wall of jungle. "And superdamnation! Mr. Downs, let your men get a bit of food, and we will follow. They can't get far without much food. There is a hundred pounds for them, I am sure."

"I don't know," said Downs, pushing back his wilting sun helmet. "I don't know whether these men will go or not. It's bad country in there."

He stepped to the door and spoke to the men, who were squatting in the lane outside. After listening a moment one of them broke into a string of quick chatter that the mate could not follow.

"He says," said Downs, "that his village needs him and that the grandmother of his friend is dying, and the third has a son about to appear in this world, and that they must get back home. The real reason is, of course, that they are afraid."

"There is a good three pounds in it for each of them."

Downs tried them again, but received the same quick answer and a gesture toward a low padauk tree.

"He says the padauk tree is about to bloom," said Downs. "You know it blossoms three times in six weeks at this time, and when the third crop of bloom comes out the monsoon breaks within a few hours. That tree is already in bud, and it has bloomed twice."

"Damned, dirty, skunking cowards!" burst out the mate. "Show me the yellow

or black man who has any real backbone, and I will make you a present of my certificate!"

"Begging your pardon," said the police officer mildly, "the Burmese are no cowards."

"Then why won't they go with me?"

"Afraid, and I jolly well don't blame them. Fifty miles across uncharted jungle, all of which will be under water within two days. It is fifty to Kettoree across country, and two hundred by water, but I know of no one who has ever gone by land. Snakes, tigers, bees, a wild elephant or two, the whole animal issue is in there, in addition to a few wild Chins probably, and some cholera."

"Then I shall bally well go myself!" shouted the mate. "Those blokes are wanted for mutiny, and a yard-arm service is what they will get. I'd like to pay that white one for this eye of mine!"

"Then why not leave him?" said Downs calmly. "Leave him to the tender mercies of the country. Have you ever heard of a dusky hamadryad? Pretty name, isn't it? It's a snake as big as a python, fierce as a boa, and, according to rumor, as poisonous as a cobra. Bringing the men back would be a favor. Patrol the coast, and the chances are nine out of ten that they will be driven back when the rain comes. Trial by jury and a term in jail—"

"Perhaps hanging," cut in the mate.

"Even that will be a boon to what they will go through. At any rate," he finished, as he looked out of the door, "my escort has decided for itself. I shall not see those chaps for a month now."

The mate stood looking at the jungle that reached out with its greedy arms into the burned-over patch that made Tony Dagon's back yard.

"I suppose you are right," he said finally. "Yes, you are right. Bringing them back would be a favor."

He threw a contemptuous look at Tony Dagon and his spelling book, and stumped out, followed by the police officer.

Tony Dagon sat with eyes on his book until the sound of footsteps died away, and then turned his face upward to the soiled ceiling cloth.

It bulged, ripped, and a man dropped to the floor as lightly as an acrobat. A negro followed him, and after the negro an owl's nest tumbled in a brown heap to the floor.

The white man darted to the door, and peered into the lane; then came back into the room and picked up the bundle which had fallen from the ceiling with him. He was a short, stocky man with a high-bridged nose and a pair of pale blue eyes, small, but at the same time very clear. The short, strong limbs were clad in a pair of denim overalls through the belt of which he carried Tony Dagon's curved sword. About his neck hung a water bottle.

The white man spit the dust from his lips and scratched himself while Tony Dagon turned the leaves of his book feverishly.

"Anne says," he stuttered, "Anne says—'He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day.'"

Jack Houston spoke to the black without heeding Tony Dagon.

"Listen, tin-head," he said, "did you hear what that beef-neck said about mutiny and hanging and the boat to patrol the coast?"

"Yeah, boss," said the negro softly. He had never moved his eyes from his master.

"Black Adam, we've got to slog it to Kettoree."

"Yeah, boss, we got to slog it."

"And quick."

Houston turned his pale, unwinking eyes on Tony Dagon.

"Why didn't you tell him we crawled up under the thatch?" he said mildly. "Didn't you hear him say there was a hundred pounds' reward for us? What's the matter with you?"

Tony Dagon shrank under the stare, but said with timid triumph at not reading it from his book: "Of two evils, choose that which is the lesser."

Houston laughed silently, and turned toward the door. With the negro following him, he dropped off to the ground and disappeared into the thick growth.

"Anne says," murmured the yellow man, "Anne says—good night!"

It is not the purpose of this narrative to tell the story of that fifty miles between

Dasson and Kettoree, except that it must be proved that within certain limits, and those very wide, Houston was a brave man.

He set his will against two things—the damning, sapping forces of the country—heat, humidity, and the unending irritation of tripping over a million little tendrils that the foot slogger never sees until they catch him. It was time for the monsoon to break, the clouds hung over the tree-tops big with the hundred and fifty inches of rain which the country must swallow in a few weeks. Behind them the sun blazed, nickel white.

And Houston set his will against the animal life of a country which spawned those things naturally hateful to man—obscene apes that threw filth at them from tree-tops, things that crawled or darted from under their feet with a hiss.

If Black Adam had lived to tell the story, out of the numberless incidents, such as the time when Houston, by driving bamboo pegs into a smooth tree trunk, climbed sixty feet to gather honey that hung there in two-foot combs, there would have been two, which, in Black Adam's mind at least, would have proved Jack Houston a great man.

They came to high land in which occasional outcroppings of rock gave them good walking. They paused at one ledge—across from them jutted another twenty feet away, and between lay a floor of loose earth thinly overgrown with vines and creepers.

Houston scrambled down to it with the faithful negro at his side, but he had not taken over a half dozen steps when he heard a *chuk, chuk, chuk*, followed by a faint *whoosh*, and a few seconds later an indistinct boom.

He stopped dead—at his left he saw a tiny hole appear in the ground, and about it the earth became suddenly alive and moved in a small whirlpool.

"Lie down, tin-head!" said Houston quietly, and let himself down on his face carefully and wriggled toward the opposite ledge of rock. Black Adam, without understanding, did as he was told, and both climbed up on the opposite ledge of rock.

Houston took a stone not much larger than his two fists and threw it down upon the track they had just covered; it caved

and went with a roar to the bottom of the cleft, perhaps two hundred feet below, leaving behind it a thin network of vines and green leaves fluttering in the whirlpool of air.

What they had crossed was a mass of loose earth, wedged for the time between two shoulders of rock. Black Adam turned ashen and fell on his knees—sick. Houston laughed, gave him five minutes in which to conquer his nausea, and plodded on.

That night they slept in a hut—a circle of scarce five feet with a conical, thatched roof and a single cross rafter, a teak slab for the door, and broad palm leaves for the sides. Here they curled up and slept. In the night Houston awoke to the touch of Black Adam's hand.

"Housie!" said the negro. "I hear a noise!"

"Good!" said the white man, without moving. But he became conscious after a moment of a steady, lisping rustle that seemed to come from all sides of the hut—a slow scrape through the grass and against the palm leaf that made the sides of the hut. The palm leaf bulged in for a moment at one point—at the same moment it gave for an inch at the opposite side of the hut. The white man rolled over, got to his knees, and peered through the joint where the roof came to the wall.

The clouds had lifted a bit, and in the sick moonlight he saw a rippling, rounded form that gleamed dustily. It moved in slow waves so close to the hut that the dry leaf rasped under the touch, but still touched it so lightly that it did not break. Houston watched a half minute before he saw the suddenly tapering tail, and then, not three feet from it, the small, wedge-shaped head that moved with steady poise a half foot off the ground.

He felt for his saber, grasped it, and stepped over Black Adam's legs toward the door.

"Gawd!" whimpered the negro. "You ain't going to open the door!"

"Let go!" whispered Houston as he felt the other grasp his wrist convulsively. "Let go, tin-head! It's better to have him come in the door than under the wall!"

Houston was Black Adam's god, and his

hold on life; he let go and swung up on the single rafter with his head pressed against the thatch. The white man drew back the teak slab a half foot, and knelt behind it with the wavy Malayan kris held aloft.

The slow ripple went on as steady as the wash against a river bank; the wedge-shaped head went past the door with majestic slowness, and the smooth form followed it.

The second time, without a hitch in that even progression, the head turned in at the door, and Houston struck—then slammed the door shut and put his back against it.

The hut shook under the titanic lashing of the whip-cord body outside—within they heard the *snap, snap, snap* of closing jaws. The thrashing body drew off into the grass without touching their shelter—Houston felt about with his saber until he found the head, and thrust it outside, then lighted a match and laughed when he saw Black Adam shivering on his perch.

"Gawd lumme!" he said. "Where's the peanuts for the gorilla!" Then he stretched out on the ground.

"What you going to do now, boss?"

"Go to sleep, tin-head, what else?"

Within five minutes he was sound asleep; Black Adam stayed on his perch until daylight, then fell asleep and tumbled off.

And with curiously meticulous care, Houston shaved every morning.

The monsoon broke. Under their eyes the padauk trees turned from greenish yellow to gold, and with that sudden bloom came a flake of water almost as hot as that which drips from an engine valve. Then the world seemed to turn to a gray mist of water; the ridge beyond which lay Kettoree faded into a fog of rain, and the flat country in which they traveled turned into a lake full of swimming wild life.

Luck was with them—they found a hut on piles and in it a teak-log canoe with paddles. They put to sea with Houston in the stern and the "kullah" in front, bailing with his hat to keep the craft afloat. The water rose above the tips of the elephant grass, and on the ridges they could hear the breaking of the padauk branches as the tiny, cuplike flowers filled with water.

Food or fire was out of the question, but progress on this island lake was infinitely easier than on foot, and they came one noon to the ridge beyond which lay Kettoree and freedom.

Before sundown they topped it; the rain lifted for a moment, and they saw, far away, the faint flash of water. Houston said nothing, but dropped to his heels, while Black Adam for the first time since they had left Tony Dagon spoke of his own accord:

"Housie," he said, "did you ever stop to think what a fine place a nice warm fo'c'sle is?"

Houston grunted and looked out through the thickening dusk, dreaming of the things that would comfort men whose flesh was puckered from wet—harsh blankets, a long table with a lamp over it, and a pan of steaming beef in the center, peaceful well decks where the pipe smoke curled up in the twilight. Houston's nostrils expanded and his lips moved at the thought of tobacco.

In the mysterious twilight a sound began—a hoarse murmur that seemed to run along the ground under the scrub. For a long moment the sound remained in the lower register, then rose to a slow, searching roar that held for a minute and then dwindled slowly until there was no sound but the dropping of water upon leaves.

The negro had risen to his knees when the sound began; Houston still squatted on his heels without moving, with his eyes fixed on the distant prospect. Only his nostrils moved a bit—that first sign of any emotion. He moved his head slowly and looked about at the impenetrable green curtain about them.

Black Adam was ashen pale; he moved over to Houston and touched his hand, but the white man did not move. For a long minute they waited while the water ticked on the leaves as regularly as the sound of a clock. The muttering began again, rose and fell, and rose to a vibrant crescendo. Involuntarily Houston's head moved back and his shoulders moved up; the negro in terror lest the thread which bound him to life would snap, watched the face of his comrade.

"Housie," he quavered, "what do you reckon that is?"

The dark dropped as quickly as a theater curtain and with it the metallic, humming roar began again. Houston rose slowly to his feet and pressed his sweating palms together. The noise died away and then began again, and as its first waves sped along under the scrub, Houston took a step with his hands out, and when that step had confirmed his emotion, for it is a psychological fact that a man is not really afraid until he begins to run, all the tragic-comic play of fear became suddenly large in his face: pallor, twitching lips, deep inspiration, and expanded nostrils, dilation of the eyes.

Houston moved slowly because he could not see—eyes ordinarily keen become, under the influence of emotion, expanded and the image is diffused and dim.

In this cruel country where there is as savage warfare between the forms of vegetable life as there is between the forms of animal life, where a seed lodging in the crotch of a noble tree throws out a network of roots which in a season will strangle that tree, where there is never-ending struggle in which the weapons are tendril and root, there is one assassin that lurks about the roots of all timber.

As long as the trunk and limbs are whole this Judaslike plant stays underground, but whenever a tree suffers an injury, as soon as, for instance, the weight of water in the myriad of tiny padauk cups breaks off a branch, there springs out of the earth a magnificent morning glory which throws its arms about the wounded giant and within a month covers it from top to base in a stifling, deadly grip of crisp tendril and tender leaf.

So it was with these two men. When Black Adam saw the play of fear in his comrade's face, the thin thread which had held up his own courage broke, and he dashed into the brush. What happened to Black Adam no one knows.

The white man himself continued to walk, but as soon as the rasping sound began again he broke into a shambling run that turned into swift flight. He ran—but not toward Kettoree. He ran back

toward Dasson, where the Ulalume nodded to the reflection of her rusty plates in the Iriwadi.

Two pictures—"iris inn" in cinema language—and the story is complete. One is of the beefy mate running across a gaunt, bearded man who wandered up and down the river bank with fluttering hands, murmuring: "The ship—the ship." The mate did not recognize him at first as the man he had condemned to everlasting Hades, but when he did even he was shocked into pity, and instead of putting Jack Houston into the admiralty court for mutiny, he put him into the hospital for the insane at Rangoon.

The other picture is that of a village of wild Chins high up on that hillside below which Houston and Black Adam stood the evening they looked down toward Kettoree.

On the edge of the village stands a hut which is half joss house and half temple. In it hangs a six-foot gong of beaten brass, and before it, on the day when the two travelers topped the ridge, stood the oldest of the men in the village—a man so old that his shrunken arm could scarcely hold the small padded stick with which, at intervals as regular as the slow drip of water, he rubbed the center of the great circle of metal.

There was no hostile intent in the old man's mind, but under his touch sound was born, sound that grew and multiplied in the taut metal, swelled out to the great, quivering rim, and bellowed out across the tree-tops and into a small glen where there squatted a brave man with one loose nerve end which led to panic.

## ON A SUMMER DAY

**M**Y pop was never young or he would let me have this whole day free,  
He'd let me climb old Digbey's Hill and hustle along to the cider mill,  
Where the fellows is helpin' a little bit, so's they can get a drink of it.  
He'd say, "Them gol durned bugs can rot! It's too durned hard and too durned hot  
For you to work out here! Now go!" But does he? Does he? He don't! No!  
He says, "You take that Paris green, and if nary so much as a bug is seen  
Or if you scoot—know what's for you?" And the trouble is—you bet I do!  
The rows are long, and potato bugs? The durndest lot I ever seen!  
The grandpaps, cousins, great-aunts, too, jest live and *thrive* on Paris green!

I think an awful lot of where the thick green trees takes off the glare;  
Of the shady pool where the great, big fish comes in to rest; and gosh, I wish  
That I could get a can of bait and jest set down and *wai* and *wait*  
For one to bite. But me? I can't, until the sun is on the slant  
And all of the sun and all of the day has faded, gone, jest *slipped* away.  
The pool in the shade is a pretty sight, and mebbe there'd be a real mud fight.  
But potato bugs, and my pop, he, they both has kept my fun from me!  
And they got the biggest families that anybody ever seen,  
And they keep right on a raisin' 'em, *in spite* of Paris green!

Then after the guys have fished until the sun sets over the Rankin's hill,  
Some kid'll say, "Let's take a swim!" and they take off their pants and their shirts and in  
They jump, and I can feel the cold. And want it— If pop would only scold—  
But he, oh gee! Dog-gone it, he has other ways of fixin' me!  
Cool places, rest, they fills the air; as real to me 'sif I was there—  
The highest dives I ever done happens here in the boolin' sun—  
Queer the things you think about, and feel so real, when you're shut out!  
My gosh, these here potato bugs are an awful long-lived lot!  
I'm tired, I'm lazy, I want to swim, and gee whiz, but I'm hot!  
*And I know one thing, and that is, that, my pop was never young or he  
Would know how it feels to swim when it's hot, and I'd have the whole day free!*

Katharine Haviland Taylor.

# Pride of Tyson

by John Frederick

Author of "Crossroads," "Luck," etc.

## WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ROUGH, and lacking in the social graces, yet avidly desirous of possessing them if their accomplishment would win for him the regard of Margaret Tyson, Garth, builder of the Chiluah Valley dam, had brought thither Henry Tyson, the girl's brother, as the bait which might lure Margaret across the three thousand miles of distance intervening.

Tyson, however, was unaware of this—he had signed an agreement at his own insistence, to labor on the dam for six months, his sole object being to fit himself physically for a boxing bout with Garth, who had bested him on a previous occasion. Such was Tyson's pride—a flame of spirit stronger than his body.

Then, on a certain pay-day, having spent seven of his twelve-dollar salary for two ties, one of them a curious, snake-like affair, he spent a dollar, half of his remaining capital, for a square meal (he roomed merely at Mrs. Casey's boarding-house, taking his meals where he could find them). Then, filled to repletion, wandering in the forest, he met Rona Armitage Carnahan, a very dryad of the woods, to whom he presented the gorgeous cravat.

Thereafter, following a strenuous week of starvation and grinding labor, he again met Rona, walking with Kennedy, a gambler—and the man was wearing the tie! Getting rid of the gambler by a ruse, he walked with the girl, who entertained him with talk of her confessor, Padre Miguel, as also with the legend of the two mountains at either end of the valley, La Cabeza and La Blanca, stating that she was engaged to marry Kennedy because he had seen the "face" of La Cabeza, and one seeing this face would either die or marry the girl of his choice within the year. Also, she confessed that she did not love Kennedy, whom she spoke of as the "Big Man."

Accidentally, Tyson broke a bottle of whisky she was carrying to her father—a drunkard. There came a wail from Rona. She was on her knees, trying to scoop up the precious fluid. It was then that she rose and fairly leaped at Tyson, the narrow blade of her stiletto glittering above her head.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MUSIC—AND OTHER THINGS.

IT would have been as easy to avoid her as to avoid the lunge of a snake; besides, he was too frozen with astonishment to move.

But her rush was checked even as she reached him. The chime of a bell floated down the Chiluah toward them, thin and small and far away, almost like a voice whistling on the wind.

The knife dropped from the nerveless hand of Rona, and clattered on the stones. She fell upon her knees, crumpling as though an invisible hand from above had smitten her to the earth. Sobs shook her terribly, and the sound of her weeping went through the heart of Tyson like the grief of a strong man whose strength is broken.

There were words, too, in her weeping, and when he leaned, he heard, over and over: "*Madre dolorosa! Madre mia! Madrecita!*"

Slowly the chiming of the well-matched bells throbbed away to silence, and Henry Tyson heard the faint whisper of the girl at her prayers for the dead. It touched a chord of awe in him and set it trembling to listen to her, and all the loneliness of the desert fell about him, and he heard the faraway rustle of the Chiluah, until it seemed that the wild girl was kneeling at the very feet of her Maker.

She looked up, at length, her eyes starry with tears, and her lips trembled.

"Shall I ever be forgiven?" she whispered. "Tell me, *señor*, shall I ever be forgiven?"

To hear such words from her—it was like

seeing a primitive Indian showing mercy to a wounded creature. Tyson caught his breath. He stooped and raised her to her feet.

"After all, there's no harm done. You were only trying to frighten me; you would never have used the knife, eh?"

"I don't know," she sighed. "That instant I hated you, Señor Tyson."

"Nonsense. You would have stopped at the last moment."

"Perhaps."

She looked wistfully at him.

"I wonder if God will think that, too?" she murmured.

Tyson had to struggle to keep from laughing aloud.

"Well," mourned the girl, "when the Padre Miguel hears of this I shall have six months of prayers and fastings. Because of you!"

She stared at him in gloomy anger.

"Why are you walking on with me? There is nothing to carry for me now. And if you go on, I may be wicked again. I feel something very bad in me."

He stopped.

"Do you want me to leave you, and go back?"

"No, no!" she cried suddenly. "I had forgot. I am not going to take the blame for breaking the bottle. Come; hurry! You shall face my father and tell him what has happened."

In the quickly coming dusk, they were almost upon the cabin before Henry Tyson noticed it. First they crossed a little rivulet lined with willows which looked like giants with enormous heads in the semidark, and when Tyson looked up, the cabin lay a few steps away.

The wall of the valley rose here in almost a cliff, and into an angle of this the cabin snuggled, protected from the wind on two sides by a natural wall.

Tyson made out the obscure, ragged outline of the house, and a crooked joint of stove-pipe twisting above it. As they stepped into full view of the place he found one small window, faintly illuminated, and the door sketched in roughly by a rectangular crack of light.

On this the girl knocked once, and then threw it open.

"Go in," she said to Tyson, and he stepped into the house.

It consisted of two rooms, or rather, one room and a wretched little cubby-hole of a lean-to curtained off from the main apartment by sacking, which was now drawn aside. It revealed what must have been the girl's sleeping-place, for Tyson saw through the low aperture a flash of color on the further wall—perhaps a bright-colored calendar—and the gleam of a mirror. Then, as if she resented the direction of his glance, the girl stepped across and jerked out the sacking, effectually blocking his vision.

The other and main room evidently served as living-room, dining-room, and kitchen. A wrecked table staggered against the wall on one side; opposite it, half a dozen ancient books lay on a small shelf; there in the corner was the roll of bedding, covered with a tarpaulin, where the father slept; and at the farther end stood the most important article of furniture—a rust-reddened stove.

These things Tyson observed in a single glance. He had no time for more, since the occupants of the place took his attention thereafter.

They were, in the first place, the man of the wolf-grin which had haunted his sleep since the first day he met Rona Carnahan, a big, gaunt man whose face was covered with an unrazored mass of shaggy hair; a man with uneasy, big brown eyes, which flashed a glance at Tyson and then flickered away and kept an outlook of suspicion upon him from the side. The other wore the vesture of a religious order, and Tyson put him down at once as the Padre Miguel himself.

He was a little, broad-shouldered man with a pale, ugly face. He looked more Irish than Spanish or Mexican. The keen sun of the southwest had not been able to tan his skin, the lichen whiteness of which suggested a lifetime spent in dungeon darkness. For the rest, a negligible nose turned up in a truly Celtic fashion, and there was an equally Irish mouth, with the long upper lip.

On the whole, Padre Miguel might have

posed as a retired pugilist; his face had that battered look. Yet the eyes denied the rest of his features. For they were bright, steady, and wide open, with brimming kindness. They fell first of all upon the hair which Tyson had uncovered as soon as he entered the place.

"This is Padre Miguel," began the girl, "and this, *padre*, is—"

"Señor Tyson," nodded the father.

He advanced with a kindly smile and took the hand of Tyson.

"We have heard of you every day since you met Rona yonder in the woods," he said. "I am glad to know you, *señor*."

He spoke English with perfect understanding of the words, that was evident, but his pronunciation was a little strange, like that of one whose knowledge of a language has been chiefly drawn from books. Obviously he must have done most of his work in this land among the peons and the Indians.

"I'm equally glad to know you, Father Miguel," said Tyson. "To tell the truth, I've been almost worried about a man of such powers."

And he watched the *padre* keenly.

The latter flushed, and then made a little gesture of deprecation, saying: "Rona has been talking. She will do that, *señor*. She has told you about withered limbs, and—"

He paused and smiled, and Tyson gave an extra pressure of understanding to his hand.

"This is Señor Carnahan," continued the *padre*, turning away to the other.

Carnahan fumbled at his bearded chin, staring vaguely at the newcomer, as though he saw a form of misty thinness and could look through and through the younger man, while Tyson spoke his greeting.

"Father!" cut in Rona sharply, softly.

Carnahan started like one recalled from a dream, and then advanced and took the hand of his guest.

"We have heard much of you, sir," he said, and Tyson's eyes opened as he heard the voice of the man—the unmistakable intonation of culture, "and of how you crossed a river—not quite so large as the Rubicon."

A lean, cold hand, barely touching that

of Tyson, withdrew, and Carnahan pointed his little speech with a bow. At once the tattered clothes were forgotten; the unkempt beard appeared magically changed to a trim Van Dyck; the walls of the hovel fell away into an imaginary vista over soft, thick carpets, past massive, polished tables, and luxuriously upholstered chairs.

"Be seated, sir," continued the host. "Rona, a chair for Mr. Tyson."

He looked about him, smiling gently. Aside from a few boxes, the only thing in the shape of a seat was the one which had been recently occupied by the *padre*.

"This will do very well," said Tyson hastily, and took a box from a corner and drew it out.

He caught the anxious eye of the girl and the quizzical frown of the *padre* upon him, and nodded covertly, reassuringly.

"Are you comfortable there?" asked Carnahan cordially, as they settled down, Rona on the roll of bedding in the corner, "Rona, will you bring something for Mr. Tyson to smoke? What will you have, sir? Cigars? Cigarettes? Rona, my dear, you will find everything in my smoking-cabinet."

"Please don't trouble," interposed Tyson hurriedly.

"No trouble at all. Light or dark cigars, sir? What is your preference? If—"

"But I really don't wish to smoke just now."

"No? Well, well! For my part, I have grown attached to tobacco and brown papers. The knack of rolling them is difficult to learn, but now I amuse myself very often making them."

He illustrated by instantly producing a little sack of tobacco and a package of the papers, and rolled his smoke deftly. A moment later it was between his lips.

While he lighted it, the *padre* looked again, quizzically, toward Tyson, and the latter nodded and smiled in understanding. Carnahan, apparently, thought himself seated in some finely appointed home. It was pitiful to watch him in his miserable rags, and a little ludicrous as well; and Tyson thought he understood the brooding look of sadness which he had sometimes noted in the eyes of Rona.

"I must go now," murmured the *padre*, rising. "Good evening, Señor Carnahan. Good night, Rona. Mr. Tyson, you must come to see the mission."

And so he was gone with bowed head through the door; and Tyson understood, with a flash of intuition, that the good man bore the burden of the sadness in that home upon his shoulders.

The moment the door closed, Carnahan leaned forward, the fragile cigarette crushing to shapelessness between his nervously contracted fingers.

"Did you get it?" he whispered to Rona. "Did you get it, girl?"

Tyson watched her eyes widen with horror, and fear, perhaps.

"I got it," she answered faintly.

Carnahan closed his eyes tightly and drew a vast breath of relief.

"I saw nothing when you came in," he said. "I didn't see that you carried anything. And I thought, for a moment—well, thank God! Quickly, Rona. Quickly! I have been dreaming of it!"

His long-fingered hand was fumbling at his throat through the beard.

"I got it," said the girl faintly, "but it was lost—the bottle was broken on the way."

The full import of what she said appeared to filter slowly into the mind of Carnahan. He sat with his lips still parted in that thirsty smile, but gradually they closed to a grim, set line, and into his brown eyes came that red light which Tyson had seen in them that other day—a nightmare thing to watch it grow. Carnahan rose from his box. He held out his hand toward his daughter with the fingers distended as stiffly as talons.

"You lost it? You broke the bottle! Then why did you come without it? By God, it's a plot against me! You're trying to drive me distracted. And I'm dying of it; dying of the fire within me. Why didn't you go back and get another bottle?"

"Because I hadn't enough money."

"You lie!" cried Carnahan in a terrible voice. "It's a plot. Oh, I see through you! It's a plot."

He made a long stride toward her, and she stood against the walls, cowering, literally

ally paralyzed with terror. The chills which ran through Tyson's own blood kept him motionless for an instant longer, then he called: "Mr. Carnahan, I'm guilty of this. I was carrying the bottle, and I dropped it."

Carnahan turned, and then Tyson understood the dumb fear of the girl; for he was facing a demoniac.

"You?" snarled the monster into which Carnahan had turned. "You?"

He was beside Tyson; he seemed to have glided there without the agency of feet, so swift was his coming, and around Tyson's wrist settled a grip like steel bands shrinking into place. Over the shoulder of the maniac he saw the girl, sick and weak with horror. She could not even cry out. And Tyson looked calmly into the red eyes before him and wondered why he was not afraid to die. For he was very near death, he knew. Even in his full vigor it would have taxed him to meet this gaunt giant in his frenzy, but now that undernourishment and overwork had sapped his muscles—

He reached behind him, not daring to take his glance from the glowing eyes before him; he felt that if he flinched, if he winced, if he turned his look away, the peril would be loosed and launched at his throat. That hand he sent groping blindly along the shelf behind him, seeking for anything which might serve as a weapon. The fingers closed on wood; he jerked out a violin, clutching the neck of the instrument with nervous strength. A foolish, flimsy weapon, but it might free him for a second from Carnahan.

"Loosen your hand, Mr. Carnahan," he said quietly. "I warn you, loosen your hand!"

"A plot," said Carnahan thickly, "and you're in it. So's Rona. Every one is in it. Every one's against me!"

He leaned a little closer, his lips working.

"Stand away from me," cried Tyson. "I warn you for the last time, Mr. Carnahan."

And he swung the violin up to a striking position. At sight of it the face of Carnahan was transfigured to blank horror, terror.

"Give it to me!" he stammered in a

panic. "Give it to me. I shall not hurt you, man. Only give it to me."

He stepped back, and then held out his hands, imploring. There was an expression about his eyes, now, oddly like that of a mother who sees her infant in danger. Tyson hesitated and instant, and then placed the instrument in the hands of the madman. He was more curious than afraid, and he stared in bewilderment as he watched Carnahan take the violin into trembling hands, fumbling and stroking it.

"The fool! The fool!" whispered Carnahan. "He might have crushed you to bits, my beautiful!"

He settled it into place, cuddling it against his chin. His right hand fumbled on the shelf, blindly, and drew forth the bow, and forgetful of all else Carnahan drew the bow slowly across the strings.

The result was a low, prolonged note, delicate as a thread of light, and as piercing. Carnahan raised the bow and stood as one who listens intently; then his face flooded with unspeakable light. It fell like grace about him, and he smiled.

"She hears us," whispered the mad musician. "She hears us. We shall talk to her to-night!"

And cautiously, reverently, he approached the bow again to the strings, while all the while his eyes probed a gloomy corner as though a human figure stood there and Carnahan strove to charm it forth into the light of the single smoky lamp with the power of his music.

And slowly and reverently the singing of the violin rose, stole on the senses of Tyson, fascinating him, swelled, filled the room. He had never heard such purity of tone. There was no scraping or whining of the rosin on the strings. It seemed as if Carnahan waved his hand through the empty air and brought forth the exquisite harmony, an improvisation of wonderful beauty. Sometimes in chorūs two and three voices sang; then the G-string mourned in organlike sorrow; and out of this sprang a thrilling, lyric note that sang at the very gate of heaven.

A hand fell on the arm of Tyson, and then the voice of Rona: "Go now, before he notices you again."

"But you?" he whispered back.

"He is used to me. He'll play like this for hours now, if only I am here. Go now, quickly!"

"I don't dare to leave you."

"You must. I tell you, I am perfectly safe. Señor Tyson, you have been brave; you have helped me, and I shall never forget!"

She stood with one hand pressed against her breast, and he could look deeply into the misted eyes. For a single moment her beauty blended with the music, became one with it, and pierced Tyson to the heart.

Where was the wild, fierce girl who had walked with him up the valley that evening?

He turned from her, and went blindly out into the night.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE INSULT.

OUT there he stood for an instant, with the music pouring out around him, transforming in his mind the squalor of the hut; until it seemed that a palace of light lay there behind him, a place of columns and marble vistas where the girl lived who had stood at his side a moment before.

He found himself standing with clenched hands and beating heart, and he had to shrug his shoulders and draw a deep breath to free himself from the fantasy. It was only a cabin on the desert valley of the Chiluhah, and a madman playing to his wild daughter.

So he went on down the valley.

Behind him the singing of the violin grew smaller and smaller, and as it faded it seemed to Tyson to come from a point directly above him; to his excited fancy the music was dropping from the sky. And there was a great warmth and kindness in his heart as he remembered the girl. He would never be able to dissociate that music from her face, he knew, and the sadness of it would haunt him.

His thoughts made the way to La Blanca short, and he swung thoughtfully up the stairs of Mrs. Irene Casey's boarding-house to his room. He had hardly closed the door

when a knock came on it, and he opened upon Kennedy, the gambler.

The big, lean fellow nodded casually in answer to Tyson's greeting, and then dropped into a chair, slowly. He surveyed his host with a calm eye while he produced and lighted a cigarette. It was not until he had flicked his own match away that he noticed Tyson.

"Smoke?"

"Thanks!"

He accepted the cigarette, lighted it, and drew a long breath deeply into his lungs. It threw him into the pleasant haze of nicotine. Into this daze broke the measured voice of the gambler.

"Got a little thing to talk over with you, partner. Won't take long. Just this; I fell for your play this evening with the girl. It was a pretty piece of work. It was like filling to a pair. But"—he leaned over, smiling, and resting a hand on his knee—"don't knife in there again. Get me?"

"I don't follow that," muttered Tyson. In fact, the words were meaningless sounds to him.

The gambler smiled again. He was perfectly tolerant and apparently good natured about it."

"Listen!" he drawled. "Don't kid me like this. When I seen your hands I knew you was one of us. East or West, Bud, the profession ain't much different. Are you wise?"

Tyson looked vaguely down at his pale, agile hands.

"I'm West," went on the gambler, "but it don't foller that I'm green goods. Take the tip from me, parner. That girl is mine. I got her corralled, roped, tied, and branded—almost. Just ease away from her—that's all!"

The smoke from Tyson's cigarette curled idly up to the ceiling, his thoughts tangled mazily with the many folded wraiths.

"Well?" This came snapping sharply from Kennedy.

"What do you want me to say?"

"That you'll keep hands off!"

It came to Tyson that it might be exceedingly dangerous to irritate this man. Yet he enjoyed courting that danger.

"I gather," he murmured, "that you have a corner on Rona?"

"Right."

"Kennedy," said Tyson, "you're a bold man."

The gambler waited, like one who is slow to anger.

"You're a bold man," repeated the Easterner. "I'd as soon try to get a corner on the wind or the blue sky as to monopolize that girl."

"What you'd do," said Kennedy, slowly feeling his way into the argument, "ain't to the point. What I've already done is the thing that counts. M' frien', that girl is going to be my wife."

He did not say it exultantly, but merely as one who advances a decisive argument. Then he leaned back and smiled once more upon his host.

"You ain't the first," he went on, to let the other find a graceful way of retreat, "that's seen Rona and liked her and tried his hand. But they all found out damned quick that they was playin' a measly pair of deuces ag'in' a royal flush. D'yous foller me, partner?"

Certainly nothing could be plainer, and Tyson realized with a pang that his interest in the girl was hopeless. That very fact made him for the first time ask himself how great that interest could be? For answer, he felt a sullen anger rise in him. It irritated him past words that this fellow should be so sure. Moreover, his eyes dwelt, fascinated upon the bright yellow and black necktie of the gambler. He had promised Rona that he would be wearing that bit of silk the very next time he met her.

He managed to smile in return to his companion.

He said: "Has it ever occurred to you, my dear fellow, that a game isn't won until the last hand is played?"

The other frowned. But he refused to be angered. His self-content was as limitless as the ocean.

"Now just what d'you mean by that lead?"

"Why," said Tyson, "does Rona like El Toro?"

"He tells her queer yarns."

"Exactly. He amuses her. And why does she like Padre Miguel?"

"I dunno. Maybe because he amuses her, too."

"And why, Kennedy, does she like you?"

"Because I—look here, m'boy—"

"Because you amuse her, eh? Tut, tut, Kennedy, do you really dream that she takes you seriously?"

The cigarette, flicked from the fingers of Kennedy and thrown through the window, described, in the dark of the evening, a shining arc.

"You're quite right in calling it a game with her," went on Tyson. "It's all a game. You're one card—perhaps I'm another—she plays them as she sees fit. We amuse her—that's all."

Kennedy rose to his full height, his hands behind him.

"One week from to-day," he said, "we get married."

Tyson smiled.

"I said a week from to-day," in a rising voice.

The smile of Tyson persisted.

"By God!" muttered the gambler. "What d'you know?"

It was that continual smile which maddened him. He reached over, grasped the shoulder of Tyson with an iron hand, and dragged him to his feet facing the dying light from the window. Perhaps Tyson had never before been touched in that manner, and now his fingers twitched to be at the throat of the tall man.

"I know," he said—and he continued to smile straight in the face of the gambler—"that we're both in the pack. She may draw you—she may not."

"And you're in the game?"

"To stay, my friend!"

"You damned—rustler!" said Kennedy through his teeth, and struck Tyson across the face with his open hand.

The blow, in itself, was nothing, but it unbalanced and sent Tyson staggering back against the wall. There he stood for an instant, crouching a little, spreading his hands against the wall behind him to give impetus to his attack. As for Kennedy, he was bolt-erect, a devil in his face, and his right hand clutching at a hip pocket.

Then—a knock at the door and a shrill voice: "Oh, Mr. Tyson, are ye there?"

## CHAPTER XX.

### ROULETTE.

"COME in," called Tyson.

Mrs. Irene Casey stood in the doorway. "Mr. Kennedy," she cried, "am I intrudin'?"

"I think our business can wait. It will even be better for waiting, eh, Kennedy?"

The hungry eye of the gambler was still measuring the other from head to foot, as if he had not yet settled on a vital place.

"Maybe it will," he growled.

"After all," said Tyson, "it will only take a moment to settle it."

"I'm glad you see that," nodded Kennedy, and he passed the tip of his tongue across his lips.

"Kennedy," said Mrs. Casey, "is it divliry ye're up to?"

"Tut, tut! Not a bit," broke in Tyson. "It's only the matter of a small debt which I owe Kennedy, and he's pressing me to pay it. *Au revoir*, sir."

The door closed heavily behind the gambler, and Mrs. Casey turned a thoughtful glance from it to Tyson. With all his soul he was longing to be at Kennedy, but he wore the quietest of smiles.

"You men," moralized Mrs. Casey, "are like dogs that growl when you pass. My man Casey was like that—God rest him! Fightin' always, day and night. He'd rather have fought once than drunk red-eye twice, which was sayin' something with Casey. Well, I seen the look in Kennedy's eye when he come up here, and I come up after him."

She winked broadly.

"Son, keep clear av him! Don't be thankin' me. Good night!"

So she was gone, and Tyson was instantly down the stairs and out on the street. He wanted Kennedy. He wanted the man's blood. He wanted to damage him in any and every possible way; and rather naturally, the first thing he thought of was the yellow-and-black necktie.

That belonged to Kennedy now, and he had promised Rona to take it from the big man. How he would get it, whether by force of gun or hand, he did not know. Above all, he continually remembered the heavy hand which had struck him across the face.

After that there was no doubt as to his destination: he headed straight for the gaming-house of big Kennedy. Not that he knew exactly what he would do in the place. Certainly he could not gamble. Even if he had had money to stake, his oath to Garth kept him from using the proceeds. But in the house he would find Kennedy, and Kennedy meant trouble, and trouble to-night would be like meat and drink.

The gambling-house was run with a shameless openness, like the other palaces of chance in La Blanca; the only attempt to conceal its location was the establishment of a dozen easy entrances and exits. In this manner Kennedy avoided having a continual stream of patrons passing in and out at any one point. His house was like a sponge with many pores through which to draw the wealth of the town; once inside, a single pressure squeezed them dry of coin.

The place had been originally a stable of some pretensions, and the stalls were still clearly marked around the sides of the open court. On these four sides were the booths where the card games went on; but the freer space of the open court was turned over to the roulette-wheel and dice, so that the crowds could circulate as freely as possible.

There is need of circulation around the roulette-wheel. No one comes to the gaming-house intending to play that mistress of misfortune; but every one stands for a moment, in passing, and listens to the hum of the spinning wheel and marks the dizzy swirl of the colors.

He stands, he watches, he presses nearer to note how the unfortunates lose their money. And coming closer in this fashion, he cannot fail to note how the wheel comes to a drawing stop. It seems strange that the wheel should be so perfectly balanced and lubricated that it will pause at random.

It seems certain that it must stop more often at a definite point on the circle. The newcomer watches and notes.

Behold! Once, twice, thrice in a half-dozen whirrs the wheel stops on the black and on the eight. A system! A dollar to try it out—it is cheap. He lays the coin. He wins. He lays again on a single number, most daring of all chances, and behold! the pointer rests on the eight. For every dollar he has wagered thirty-six pour into the hand of the gambler.

An hour later he leaves with downward head. He has emptied his pockets and pawned his watch for a tittle of its value. And still the wheel hums and spins behind him. Next pay-day he will return and exact vengeance. Luck cannot stay *always* against him!

Under the arch of the entrance Tyson stood and watched the scene. A motley crowd: white and brown, engineer and foreman and humble peon, they rubbed shoulders in this place. A swirling haze of cigarette smoke that mounted in lazy drifts disappeared, and above it was the blue-black of the sky with the golden stars burning their way down, lower and lower. A strange setting for the game, but in spite of the setting all was familiar to Tyson. No matter for the faces and the complexions; the eyes were the same the world over—narrowed, bright with hunger.

He knew that fat man in the white suit at the poker-table yonder as well as if he had played against him. The large upper lip was pendulous, uncertain, and the chin-blue eyes rolled wildly here and there now and again. He was winning heavily, Tyson knew. But he would lose it all before the evening was over.

Opposite sat a smiling youth who tossed his cards on the table with a flick of disdain. Tyson could almost tell to a dollar how much he had lost, and what sort of a letter he would write to his father explaining the loss. He was a young engineer, no doubt.

At the same table was a Mexican with a face pouched by unutterable weariness. The eyes of Tyson flashed as he recognized metal worthy of his sword. Automatically he reached into his pocket; but the wallet

pinched flat under his fingers, and he groaned aloud.

He turned his glance to the central court. The crowd was small at this early hour; shortly there would hardly be breathing space, but now men drifted idly from place to place. Barefooted Mexican boys clad in thin white ran here and there carrying small trays covered with glasses. The size of the glasses proclaimed the dynamic quality of the liquor. That colorless stuff was *tequila*, or gin; the reddish-brown was whisky of uncertain quality and high proof.

Free drinks for the gamesters—the more they took the better. Yes, at this young hour free drinks for every one; trade lagged. A tray was held up in front of Tyson, but he waved it aside. He needed a clear head this night.

For behind the roulette-wheel he saw the tall form of Kennedy; and the light struck sharply on two things—the teeth of the gambler as he smiled, and the yellow-and-black of the necktie he wore. Rona Garnaean would look for that necktie around the throat of Tyson when they next met. Tyson moved forward involuntarily, and each step brought him, against his will, closer and closer to Kennedy. The proprietor stood behind the roulette-wheel; the disk of light which the wheel made as it spun was all the advertisement that the game needed—that and the light clicking as it whirred more slowly toward the final pause.

Before the wheel the small and silent group was gathered—true roulette players, standing with their eyes fixed on the terrible little machine, wagering not more than once every dozen spins. But when they wagered, it was because they had figured out a little system which gave them at that instant a superior chance.

A typical roulette crowd, and, therefore, a crowd which was losing heavily: yet the fascination held them. Once in a while one of them ventured to play a single number, and always lost, but each time the other players held their breaths and gasped as the little pointer became stationary.

For they had witnessed the great opportunity—a chance so great that there

was an element of the divine in it—thirty-six to one! Ten dollars wagered might bring to the lucky man three hundred and sixty! Aye, and if he left his money for a second trial he would be paid seventy-two for one, or twenty-five thousand nine hundred and twenty dollars—all in the space of a few seconds—a fortune—by the bright spinning of a wheel.

Indeed, in this game against the wheel chance was dignified, and became worthy of the ponderings of a strongly contemplative mind. Perhaps this explained the philosophical calm of the men who stood about the wheel as Tyson approached. They were Mexicans, mostly, and all that good or bad fortune could elicit from them was a flash of teeth or a glint of eyes. Then they pushed their towering sombreros farther back and lapsed once more into the brown study.

It was one of these fellows that Tyson inadvertently shouldered as he made his way closer to the roulette-wheel—a little man whose palm was as smooth with polished callouses as fine mahogany. He was so lean that his mouth puckered at the sides, and yet at the touch of Tyson's arm he glared up with a sudden ferocity which deeply appealed to the white man.

For he recognized, as it were, a kindred spirit—a hungry man playing the wheel. As for the Mexican, the angry light died instantly from his eyes—and his labor-withered arms waved through a graceful gesture of welcome.

"El Oro!" he murmured.

Tyson smiled down into the yellow face, and in a rush of warm brotherliness he wanted to take this poor fellow to one side and explain to him how little chance he had to beat the wheel—how sure he was of ruin if he kept at it. For though the wheel in theory gives no advantage to the house and affords an equal chance to the gambler, yet in fact it has a terrific advantage, for the wheel is a machine, and no man, however nerveless, can play forever against it.

An illusion comes to him, a belief that one color or one number, or one set of numbers, is more lucky than the rest. His reason may assure him perfectly that there

is nothing but delusion in this belief, but nevertheless the idea haunts him. What gambler, for instance, will ever lay on thirteen or twenty-three? And yet the wheel stops as often upon these numbers as upon any others.

These are the things which give the machine the advantage. The gambler does not realize them; how could he dream that the very power which is emptying his pocket is the force of his own emotions, his temperament; and all that is of most use to him in other places serves to disarm him when he confronts the humming wheel.

But the least reflection, of course, assured Tyson that it would be worse than folly to lecture a Mexican; and now a withered, brown hand was laid upon his arm, and those unhealthy eyes of black set in yellow were burning up to him.

"All is not well with me," said the peon, and his attempted smile was a convulsive twitching of the lips; "all is not well with me, Señor El Oro. I lose much money. The wheel sings the wrong tunes to-night. Ah, but the devil is always in Señor Kennedy. He is always sure to win. Yet if Señor El Oro were to lay my coins for me—"

He extended a ten-dollar gold piece with an inviting smile.

"If I should play the money for you—and lose it—will you stop playing for to-night?"

The hand of the Mexican shook with eagerness; his eyes begged like the eyes of a dog. "Yes, yes! Do but play for me. Surely I am not a fool, nor the son of a fool, and I have no fear that you will lose—even to Señor Kennedy. And if you *do* lose"—he shuddered, and Tyson saw that he held the fellow's last coin—"it will be a plain judgment of God," finished the peon weakly, and he moistened his lips.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE NECKTIE RETURNS.

"WE are playing the black, then," said Tyson coolly, and he placed the money; and while the wheel spun he looked from the ghastly face of the peon to the

scornful complacency of Kennedy—the man who knew that no human being could win against his machine. The wheel slowed, the ball clicked into its place—the black had won. Tyson struck down the hungry hand of the peon as he reached for his winnings.

"Try again," he insisted, and looked fixedly at the chief gambler.

So intent was the gaze that Kennedy at last twitched his glance from a distant table where the stakes were running high, and pierced Tyson with his stare. Then Kennedy frowned and looked down; he was trying to recall the colorless face below him; he was trying to recall some great winning in the past which made the fellow stand there with that familiar hate in his eyes. And in his meditation he absent-mindedly stroked his necktie.

He was a very large man, this Kennedy. He had big bones that finished off his shoulders in sharp points, and his chest was thick. Great cords lined his throat, and when he returned his head these cords jumped out and quivered like banjo-strings against his collar.

And he had large hands. There was no muscle in them. They were only bones and sinews; they could have been drawn with straight lines; there was black hair running down over the back of those hands almost to the big knuckles, and thickening into a veritable mane toward the wrist.

Tyson watched those hands for a while. He hardly heeded that the wheel had stopped on the black; he hardly noted the whimper of joy from the Mexican; he was only aware that Kennedy was now staring at him steadily. They were hating each other with a cordial vehemence.

After a time—ten seconds, ten ages, perhaps—the peon touched Tyson timidly on the arm. The white man looked down into a face that was strained with a joy more terrible than pain.

"Look!" said the peon, and pointed to a little heap of gold on the black. "Shall I not take it now? We have won—so many times—shall we tempt the dear God again?"

"Take your money and go home," said Tyson, not unkindly, for he was grateful

for the interruption of the duel of glances between him and Kennedy. He considered the little man more in detail as the latter scooped up his gold and then extended the larger half toward his benefactor.

"No, no!" smiled Tyson.

"Ah, *señor!*" pleaded the peon; "only a single coin—for a souvenir of one who shall pray for you daily—and his children shall pray for you!"

"Not a single cent," replied Tyson. "As for you"—and here he frowned—"you have now enough money to redeem the jewels of your wife which you pawned."

The peon was agape; he clutched his breast with both agonized hands.

"Our Lady of Guadalupe has told you all!" he gasped. "Ah, *señor!* Ah, Señor El Oro!"

"Not a soul shall know of it," said Tyson, keeping back his smile, "if you go instantly to the pawn-shop and redeem the jewelry—and take your wife home some—er—what do you call them—reboso? Good! Off with you!"

"I travel on wings!" panted the little peon, and Tyson turned again to the roulette-wheel. As he did so, something tugged lightly at the bottom of his coat. He glanced down; then he slipped his hand into the pocket and brought out a five-dollar gold-piece; the peon had left his souvenir.

Tyson turned; the little man was nowhere in sight. Then he moved to restore the gold to the roulette-wheel that had originally lost it; for by the terms of his contract he must not accept either the winnings of chance or charity. Yet he paused with the gold-piece gripped hard into the palm of his hand.

Five dollars would do a number of things. One might buy fifty loaves of bread; or great steaks, seared above and below to retain the rich juices; or—he stopped in his count of possibilities. A given word is a little thing, but now his promise encompassed Tyson like the surrounding barrels of cannon. Let chance, which had given him the money, receive it again.

He stepped forward to lay his coin, and he placed it where he was sure to lose—on

a single number. As he stepped back again he was aware of a sudden focusing of eyes upon him, and a murmur about him; first he saw that his wager was the only one that was laid. Then he perceived that the gamblers before the roulette-wheel had ceased all operations to watch him; he met a circle of curious, half-jealous, half-reverent glances, and he heard the strange nickname again: "El Oro!"

The wheel hummed to a pause; he heard the voice of Kennedy, sharpened now by the first touch of emotion, calling his number. Then he saw the proprietor waiting for him to collect his winnings.

His hands itched after that gold. He forgot the food and his own burning hunger, but the passion of the gambler caught him up; he had to fight it down. His given word tied his hands behind him.

So he said, smiling oddly up to the face of tall Kennedy: "Stake it all on the same number—against the necktie you're wearing, sir!"

It was rare to see Kennedy shaken, but now he first flushed and then frowned, and was shaking his head when he caught the murmur of the peons: "He will not dare; he will not risk even his necktie; it is El Oro he plays against!"

The wisest man in the world may be tempted by the idle taunt of a child.

"I take you," said Kennedy, and spun the wheel. For there was only one chance in seventy-two, after all, that El Oro could win. And the wheel hummed, and the spokes whirled into one unbroken flash, which in turn grew dim and dimmer, and then broke into sections, and finally was turning slowly, slowly, until it entered on what was plainly the last circle it could make.

And at a snail's pace the pointer crept on—and on—Tyson heard some one praying in swift Spanish, and he heard another voice beside him cursing in the same soft speech; and he was suddenly aware how fiercely he desired to win—that necktie. When the eyes of Rona fell upon the yellow and black pattern what would she say?

He had won. A blur across his own vision did not enable him to make sure with his own eyes, but first he heard a harsh

outbreak of joyous exclamations from the Mexicans, and then he saw the strong, pale hands of Kennedy go up to his throat and tear the necktie loose. The bright silk was dangled before his eyes, and as he took it he heard Kennedy say: "Another score, Señor Tyson. But the longest reckoning can be paid in one lump sum, eh?"

But Tyson could not answer. The retort came up in his throat and stuck there; he was too happy for talk.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### SUCCESS.

A CERTAIN measure of success makes men cruel. The best of us are flavored with viciousness in varying proportions; if we are kindly one moment we strike an average with satire or irony the next. The politician snarls at his wife's supper, and thus erases from his mouth the lines of good-nature which the practise of the day has engraved there; we are all more or less children, and smash our toys for the pleasure—if, no other—of self-torture.

Now Edward Garth was winning. The dam was nearly done. He was already receiving congratulatory letters. Engineers were coming thousands of miles to see this masterpiece in the making. Scientific magazines sent out representatives to write articles about the Napoleon of the thirsty desert.

To be sure, Garth did not take time off to taste these pleasures. He was in sight of his goal, but his ship was still in deep water, and might conceivably sink before he touched the shore.

He had the confidence, then, of success, and he had the spur of danger goading him on remorselessly to full speed. He would have been more than human if moral considerations had not to some extent fallen by the wayside.

Ordinarily, he would never have stooped to double-dealing with Tyson or any one else, for the name of "Honest" Ed Garth was not an empty one, but now the end began to justify the means, in his eyes. After all, his crime against Tyson was a

more or less imaginary one. No harm was done to the man, and as for his sister, it was certainly not a dangerous plot against her—his attempt to bring her out to the Chiluah.

But when he made these deductions he overlooked one thing: one cannot do gratuitous wrong to another without poisoning one's own mind. He still felt the distance between himself and Tyson. It was as strong when he talked to the man in the cement-house as it had been when he sat at Tyson's table in the New York house on Gramercy Park. That perfect breeding and graceful manner of Tyson's became something of a personal insult.

Eight hours of sound sleep would have cleared the brain of Garth and reduced him to the normal; as it was, he felt a danger in the flamelike pride of Tyson. The fellow actually looked up to him—but only as a model of muscular manhood. If Tyson dreamed for an instant that the rough-handed engineer aspired to his sister's hand—ah, there would be the rub!

Something of this was passing through the mind of Garth as he sat in his office this evening. He had dined with a great consulting engineer and two men of money—overlords of the street—and now he was back in harness. For the dinner he had had to don a Tuxedo, but when he sat again in the office he lapsed to the normal, rolled up his sleeves to the hairy elbows, tore off his high collar, and turned in the neck of his shirt. He could think better in such a costume. A stiff-bosomed shirt cramped his mind.

Something went wrong outside; it brought half a dozen of his lesser bosses into the office, and for ten minutes Garth was shouting at them from blueprints and pinching home his ideas with a brandished fist. He finished with a little profane exhortation that brought them out of their chairs like horses under the spur and curb, and then they were gone, pell-mell, through the door, and clattering down the high, wooden stairway.

He turned back, perspiring, when he heard the sound of a woman's voice from his secretary's room, the waiting chamber.

The sound of it stopped him—held him

poised and waiting for he knew not what. It was like the pause on the football-field just before the kick-off, with the two teams scattered on the green, each man crouched and waiting, and all the crowded bleachers breathless with expectation. The door opened; his secretary was announcing a lady to see Mr. Garth.

A lady? What did the secretary mean by the inflection, the singular drawl with which he lingered over the word? And there was a peculiar meaning suggestive of criticism in the eyes which he fixed upon his chief.

"Show her in," growled Garth.

The secretary turned away, and then came back. He seemed in a silent distress.

"Well?" asked Garth.

"Shall I bring you your collar and coat?" suggested the man.

Blood leaped in the veins of Garth. It was not the first time he had sensed an incipient contempt in this smooth-spoken, trimly dressed youngster. It was a continual reminder of Tyson, in some subtle manner.

"To hell with collar and coat," roared Garth. "Show her in. Is this a drawing-room?"

The secretary vanished through the door as if impelled by a strong hand, and in the brief pause Garth remembered that his oath must have rung with perfect clearness into the outer room. He dropped into his chair. It fortified him with official importance to be thus ensconced behind a desk; and then he saw Margaret Tyson in the door.

Into the second before he went to greet her Garth crowded some intense thought. First he wanted to shout aloud with triumph. Then he remembered Henry Tyson with a touch of cold shame.

But, after all, what was that? Margaret Tyson stood in his office; Margaret Tyson was at the valley of the Chihuah; Margaret Tyson was in his country—the country of the strong hand and the fighting man. If he could have known that this thing would be before the night was over—if he could have gone to Tyson and made a clean breast of it—the entire harmless artifice which had now won its fruits—no, it was too late for that. He remembered the face

of Tyson when the latter had refused to dine with the big boss. Pride!

Garth had moved from behind his desk; he was shaking hands with her. He was aware that Margaret looked first at his hand and then at his face as he greeted her. And it made him see that his hand was very soiled, and that her yellow gloves were very fresh.

It was still worse when she raised her eyes, for the bright glance went through and through him, and he was conscious that there were dark, soiled places in his soul of souls.

He asked her to sit down, and she thanked him graciously; but no sooner was she seated than something in her cool composure made him tremendously ill at ease. He stood grotesquely, in the middle of the floor, with his feet braced wide apart as though he stepped on the bridge of a sea-tossed ship; and his hands dangled, vast and useless. So he went behind the desk to cover his confusion.

He was no sooner seated than he regretted the move keenly. Would she think that he had taken up the position the better to impress her with his official significance? A faint shadow of a smile was touching at the corners of her mouth, and his heart sank. Moreover, the protecting desk did not cover his collarless neck, nor his unkempt hair. Margaret was glancing out the window. There was nothing but blank dark outside; was she pretending that she did not notice?

It had seemed an age to the disturbed mind of Garth, but it was really only an instant after she sat down that she spoke: "You're busy, Mr. Garth. I only want to find out Hal's address. I've been writing to him, general delivery, you see, for he's been expecting to move. Can you give it to me?"

The very sound of her voice troubled him, as darkness had frightened him with the terror of the unknown in his childhood. She threw him back upon an aggressive defensive in which he felt a foolish desire to talk about things he had done, show himself in action, justify his existence. But here, under her eyes and in his own office, he was helpless.

"I have his street address," he said, and he scribbled the house number on a card and shoved it across the desk.

He saw her hesitate an instant, and then she rose and took the card. Sweat poured out under the arm-pits of Garth. He should have carried the card to her.

"Thank you," she was saying, as she glanced at the card. "I'll keep you no longer from your work."

She was going toward the door. For a frantic instant there welled in Garth a terror that he might find nothing in his empty brain—nothing to speak to her, and detain her. She was passing between his very fingers like the water of a mirage.

"Wait!" he cried, a little hoarsely, rising.

She turned to him, her eyebrows politely raised.

"Yes?"

Why the devil was she so poised? Why did her color come and go for no reason? Why were her eyes so mistily bright?

"You're staying at my mother's house while you're in La Blanca, of course, Miss Tyson?"

"That's very kind of you. But I suppose I'll be with Hal, you know."

"You couldn't possibly," he went on, breathing more easily now. "Tyson lives in a little boarding-house. He wants to. He's leading the hard life, you know."

Garth laughed uncertainly, but the girl nodded.

"I know about that. But if he can stay there, I can, as well."

"You really mustn't. I'll be hurt if you don't come to us. So will my mother. She knows of the pleasant time I spent with you in New York. Besides, we have loads of room."

He was so insistently earnest that the girl looked at him with a rather sharp touch of curiosity.

"But it would upset Mrs. Garth to have me come at such an hour. To-morrow, if I may—"

He brushed away her objections with a wave of his big arm. He had come quite close to her now, a towering figure, forgetful of his disarray, and to the girl he seemed a figure strong enough to take the burden of Atlas.

"You'll upset nothing. There are half a dozen rooms that can be put at your disposal in five minutes. You'll come? Of course you will. I'll take you down right now."

He began to roll down his sleeves.

"You mustn't do that." And she raised a hand to stop him. He may have amused her a little, but he also pleased her. He could see it in her eyes; feel the new cordiality in her voice. "I want to see Hal by myself the first time—look in and surprise him."

"All right. Halloo, McIntosh!"

The secretary appeared at the door.

"Mac, will you take Miss Tyson in the machine wherever she wants to go? She has the address with her. And bring her around to my house when she's ready. Miss Tyson, may I present Mr. McIntosh?"

While McIntosh was bowing, Garth suddenly wanted to wring the fellow's neck. He was not in the least embarrassed by the girl's beauty. He seemed to take her as a matter of course. Garth would have given nameless things for that same cocksureness.

"I'll see you later, then?" he went on to Margaret.

"Indeed, yes. You're sure I won't disturb your mother if I come in a little late? I may be quite a while with Hal."

"Take your time. Take your time. Nothing will disturb mother. She used to run—" he was about to say "boarding-house" when he checked himself. "She'll take care of you. You'll find your brother thin. Been working too hard, and I'm afraid he shows it."

"Good night, then. And thank you so much."

A little rising inflection in the middle of the speech that sent a thrill through Garth. He could only nod in silence, and then they were gone.

He watched them covertly through the partly opened door. McIntosh was already chatting comfortably with her. Confound the fellow! He would bear watching. Never could tell about these smooth self-satisfied ones.

The rattle of the automobile starting; then the engine fell into a smooth humming,

and slid away, and a fragment of pleasant laughter blew back to Garth.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### BROTHER AND SISTER.

**M**CINTOSH abused the advantageous position of his mission shamelessly. It was bad enough to discover that the head-lights were not focusing, and get down and pretend to straighten them; it was worse to twice think that a tire was soft; but it was perfectly inexcusable to develop engine trouble in the outskirts of La Blanca and call Margaret out of the car to ask her opinion on a matter of the magneto.

However, there were palliating circumstances. The girl wore a carefully tailored suit and a tailored hat with only one spot of color in it; her new gloves, plumply filled, and with straight seams and un-wrinkled wrists, gave her whole tone a touch of the Puritanical. The collar of her shirt-waist turned back in a white fluff from her throat, and it needed only one touch of softness to make her blossom. She had the color and the unexpected beauty of the century plant—fabled to bloom only once in a hundred years.

But at last McIntosh could delay no longer, and Margaret stood in Mrs. Casey's hall alone. The hall light hung above and behind her, and Mrs. Casey squinted to make her out.

"I could call Tyson down into the parlor," she suggested, "but there's a couple of gents in there now havin' a quiet glass of beer. You see?"

"I will see him in his room," was the answer. "I am his sister."

"I ain't heard—" began Irene Casey, frowning, but here Margaret turned impatiently, and in so doing the light fell more fully on her face. "Oh," murmured Mrs. Casey, "I guess it's all right. I got to be careful, you know; my house has got a name!" she continued by way of apology. "Just step up this way."

And she led up the stairs. Under the ample pressure of Mrs. Casey's step the boards groaned, and she stirred up from the carpet a faintly pungent dust—the desert

alkali that clings like a perfume. Moreover, there lingered about that stairway innumerable odors of strong laundry soap, and the fragrances of cooking, all embalmed and crowded together until the air was heavy with the ghosts of meals long past and forgotten.

Margaret followed her captain to the hall above, where a pendant electric-light, nearly burned out, made a spot of yellow around which the dark hung heavily and seemed to stir like smoke.

"Here you are," said Mrs. Casey, and paused with her stout hand suspended in air before she knocked. "The young gent ain't in top spirits, ma'am. Ain't he sort of sickly by nature? Between you and me, I lay it to the cheap Mex chow he's been living on. As I was sayin' to him myself the other day: 'A white man,' says I, 'needs a white man's food.' Now, if I'm wrong, just call me a liar!"

She waited another instant, but receiving no challenge, she at length allowed her hand to fall heavily on the door; the vigor of the knock shook the wooden frame and resounded through the hall. There was no response.

"Maybe he's asleep," said Mrs. Casey.

"I really must see him," answered Margaret Tyson, and with this she pushed past Mrs. Casey and set the door ajar. Inside, all was dark as a blindfold. It was like the presence of deeper night pushing out at them.

"Hal," cried Margaret, not loudly, but with a tremulous vibrancy. "Hal!"

Margaret stepped fully into the room.

"Lady," cautioned Mrs. Casey, "be quiet. Men ain't nacherl when they wake up quick."

"Halloo!" called a hoarse voice from the middle of the dark. Then the bed-springs creaked, a foot thudded softly on the floor, a light snapped on.

He stood with his arm still raised toward the light above his head. He had lain down in his shirt and trousers, merely kicking off his shoes; the pattern of the rough spread was clearly designed in red along the side of his face; his hair stood on end; and the chalky apparition squinted at them, blinking at the flare of light.

"Now, ain't that a pretty picture," grumbled Mrs. Casey; but here Margaret calmly shut the door behind her.

Now, it was a very clean and well-kept room as rooms went in La Blanca. The strip of matting by the bed had once been a bright and cheerful spot, though now the shuffling of unnumbered feet had worn away the design, and the original reds and greens were oddly blended in that common overtone of gray.

The bed itself had, on a time, been neatly enameled in white over the iron, and indeed there were still patches of white here and there upon the frame, though usually in a peeling state. The wash-stand was like the rest of the room: time, not Mrs. Casey, was at fault. The lip of the pitcher was roughly broken away, exposing the brown stuff of the earthware, and a jagged crack darted down the fair, smooth belly of the pitcher.

The wall-paper was on three sides regularly and pleasantly green, with a design in gold, but on a fourth side some torrential rain, leaking, perhaps, from the floor of the

room above, had washed out the green and the gold, and streaked that portion of the wall with grisly browns.

It was along this wall, therefore, that the practical common sense of Mrs. Casey had concentrated the pictures. Three nymphs danced in a discreetly misty woodland; neighboring, a big Newfoundland held guard over a little kitten, his brows wrinkled with supernal and defiant wisdom; and there was a flour-poster showing a girl with a shower of straw-colored hair down her back and several choice stalks of wheat between the whitest of white teeth; while nearby was a print of George Washington —forehead singularly narrow and his jaw most amazingly large.

It chanced that now the smile of the selfless patriot looked over the head of Tyson and straight into the eyes of Margaret; and it freed her, strangely, from the hysteria that had leaped up in her throat when she first saw Hal. She recovered slowly from the first shock. That wavering, gaunt-faced man was not the one she knew. He was not clean.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,  
the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.



# Money Balks

by Artemus  
Calloway

**G**LOOM! Gloom in black, squashy chunks was perched on Pete's shoulder and riding his soul like an imp from the lower regions. The heavy, dark cloud hanging over distant Bishop's Point was no more depressing than the

mantle of hopeless despair which engulfed the old negro's very being and was smothering the last vestige of hope within him.

Pete had heard some time, somewhere, that hope springs eternal in the human breast; but his very attitude gave this and

all other optimistic phraseology one answer. And that answer was that optimism in all its forms is a lie and a cheat.

Pete was finding the world a howling wilderness, and every crevice loaded and crammed with wo. No prisoner upon whom the death sentence has just been pronounced ever found less in his surroundings to cheer him than did this stoop-shouldered old negro who felt that old man Hard Luck had a strangle-hold on him and was surely and pitilessly squeezing out his life.

And all this was because a man giving his name as the Honorable Cuthbert Mendenhall had conceived the idea of taking a trip to Honduras, and decided upon Tela in that little republic as the scene of his operations.

The Honorable Cuthbert announced himself as an organizer, but Pete had some time before reached the conclusion that the heavy-built, brown-skinned man was one of the most efficient disorganizers it had ever been his misfortune to come in contact with.

The newcomer had quickly ingratiated himself in the good graces of such shining lights of Tela colored society as Big Gun, Goldtooth Cotton, Hoghead Puckett, Rambling Sam, Goodtimes Harris, and others of like prominence, by buying freely and often at the railroad saloon. And once well established as a gentleman and sport, the Honorable Cuthbert had made known the important business bringing him to Tela.

When this announcement came Tela was left gasping for breath.

For the Honorable Cuthbert Mendenhall was none other than the Grand Exalted International Organizer of the Kings and Queens Order of the Shining Stars of the Milky Way.

The Honorable Cuthbert's cheap, street-corner-stand printed business-cards bore proof of this greatness; and if there was any doubt left in the mind of some thick-headed skeptic, the easy spender of ready cash had letter-heads and envelopes, all bearing his name and official position, and each and every time his name appeared

that awe-inspiring word Honorable was in front of it.

Further, he had stacks and stacks of the order's literature—application blanks, charters for subordinate lodges, printed testimonials as to the Honorable Cuthbert's shining character and uprightness. These and other proofs had he—and all these proofs he presented.

At first old Pete only sniffed his disapproval of this flashily dressed, loud-mouthed negro. But there came a day of rude awakening—a day when Pete feared he had slumbered too long.

Aided by Big Gun, Goldtooth Cotton, and others, the Honorable Cuthbert Mendenhall, Grand Exalted International Organizer of the Kings and Queens Order of the Shining Stars of the Milky Way, was planning the establishment of a subordinate lodge in Tela.

And if this plan went through it meant the certain death of the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light, organized by Pete, and of which he was president and treasurer.

Several of the American and Jamaica negroes sojourning temporarily in Tela had long been jealous of the social standing Pete's position as head of the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light gave him. So, when opportunity presented itself to break up his lodge and assist in the establishment of one in which they would shine more brightly and promiscuously than in one dominated by Pete, they were ready to take full and complete advantage.

The Honorable Cuthbert was no piker when it came to boasting the advantages of membership in the Kings and Queens Order of the Shining Stars of the Milky Way.

"Anybody," proclaimed he, "would rather be a king or queen than a knight or lady. An' who cares nothin' 'bout no guidin' light nohow? If'n you's kings an' queens in a star s'ciety, you ain't gwine need no light: you gwine be the light yo'-se'f. An' ev'ybody knows that the Milky Way means a lan' o' riches an' plenty—plenty of good eatin', plenty of good drinkin', plenty of fun an' good times."

Besides all these good things to be en-

joyed by the members of the new lodge, there were others of a rather commonplace but nevertheless delightful nature. Chief among these was the promise of "returns."

The Grand Exalted International Organizer had to explain this feature of the lodge to Big Gun in detail.

"Brudder Big Gun," said the Honorable Cuthbert—"an' insodenly it ain't gwine be right to call you jes' o'dinary brudder, but Brudder King Big Gun, a'ter you jines de new lodge—I gwine esplain 'bout them returns to you, full an' complete. Whut is meant by returns is this—if'n somethin' goes 'way an' comes back again, that's returns. You understan'?"

Big Gun nodded. The Honorable Cuthbert Mendenhall continued: "Well, ev'y dollar that you pays as jue's an' 'vestments in this yeah Kings an' Queens Order of the Shinin' Stars of the Milky Way comes back to you fum the head lodge in Atlanta, Jawjy, in jes' one yeah fum the day you pays it in, an—" The Grand Exalted paused. "An' 'sides that, when it do git back, ev'y dollar has added to it one mo' dollar which it has picked up in its rounds. That's whut we calls the returns. Does you git me?"

Big Gun nodded. This negro who used "t's" when Big Gun used "d's" was doing some rapid going, but Big Gun was keeping along within yelling distance. "I done got you dat fur, Honorable, but dey's some mo' whut ain't jes' 'zactly plumb plain in mah min'. How do dat one dollah make another dollah in jes' one yeah?"

The Honorable Cuthbert smiled. Explanations of this nature were dead easy.

"Co'se that's got to be esplained to you. I done overlooked that as I went along. You see, up theah in the head lodge us is got a 'vestment pahtment. Us throws all the dollars whut comes in, in the 'vestment-room, an' the 'vesters in there they 'vests them dollars in s'curities which makes the extry dollar."

Big Gun nodded. "I done seed it all plumb plain now. But dey's sumthin' else. "Whut 'bout fun'rals an' benyfits?"

The Grand Exalted smiled. He was an easy smiler. Big Gun liked that smile.

"A ve'y good p'int—a ve'y good p'int to bring up, Brudder Big Gun," proclaimed the brown-skinned one. "You see, fun'rals an' benyfits is taken keer of by the intrus' on the returns. Y' see, in addition to the big returns on 'vestments an' jue's, they is a heavy intrus'. That takes keer of fun'rals an' death benyfits—an'—an'—sichlike, includin' sickness 'mongst the kings an' queens. Is you done got me good an' cleah?"

Big Gun had him good and clear. He understood thoroughly that for every dollar he paid into the lodge he would, at the end of one year, get back that same dollar—and another dollar to match it. Pete's dinky little old Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light certainly was a piker!

And then the dirty work had commenced. The Honorable Cuthbert Mendenhall found would-be members of the Kings and Queens Order of the Shining Stars of the Milky Way flocking to him.

The majority of the members of the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light announced their intention of deserting the local organization for one that was international in scope, and which possessed such bright returns and investment features. And many more, not members of the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light, were hooked by Cuthbert's glittering promises.

Grand Exalted International Organizer Mendenhall assured his friends that there was no limit to the amount they might invest in the lodge's 'vestment department.

"The mo' 'vesters they is 'mongst the lodge membahs," declared Cuthbert, "the mo' they is gwine be intrusted in the returns. An' them whut is intrusted in the returns makes the most liveliest membahs."

Old Pete had issued a warning to the members of the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light when Cuthbert Mendenhall's plans first reached his ears.

"You niggahs is fixin' to git yo'se'ves all messed up in sumth'in' you ain't knowin' nothin' 'bout," he told them. "Whut you knows 'bout disyeah strange niggah fum de States, nohow?"

"Huh!" grunted Goldtooth Cotton. "You's jes' jealous. You's skeered de Hon'rable 'Zalted Gran' Organizer gwine huht yo' lodge. He ain't gwine huht it—he's jes' gwine spile it untirely an' complete. Dis is whut you gits fo' bein' sech a back'ard ol' niggah. If'n you'd gone an' fixted some 'vestment an' return 'pahtments in yo' lodge, mebbeso us wouldn't be ready to quit it an' jine dis one o' Brudder 'Zalted Cuthbert Mendenhall's."

And so matters had gone. Pete watched his members lining up with Brudder Mendenhall, hoping against hope that something would happen to show them the error of their ways.

But nothing happened, and nothing seemed likely to happen except the breaking up of the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light—the organization which meant more to Pete than all else in the world.

Pete thought of all that had happened since Mendenhall's arrival in Tela, as he stood now on the beach in front of the Honduranean customs-house and gazed out over the ever restless Caribbean. The dark cloud over Bishop's Point gradually scattered and disappeared, but the cloud hovering over Pete's soul remained there, dark and heavy as ever.

Finally the old man turned and made his way slowly to the customs-house, thence around the corner to the railroad, and down this to the railroad saloon. In this favorite rendezvous of Tela's colored population Pete found several of his acquaintances.

The Honorable Cuthbert filled considerable of the center of a large circle. He was relating more of the wonderful benefits to be derived from membership in the Kings and Queens Order of the Shining Stars of the Milky Way.

"Co'se," the Grand Exalted International Organizer was saying, "Co'se I ain't a man whut's aimin' to huht nobody else. But, gen'muns, business is lakin' to this: The good an' the bad is bofe done been placed on this heah mundane sphere. We all knows they is heah, bofe of 'em. An' us all knows that they ain't nobody whut kin make us take the one us don't want.

But us all knows that we's gwine take one of 'em—either the good or the bad. An' it res'es with us whichever one us gwine take. It's that way with secret sc'ieties, lodges, an' in gittin' yo'se'f a wife, as well as in pleasure—it's that way in ev'ything."

The Grand Exalted paused and rubbed his hands together. "Now, I ain't tellin' nobody to quit the Knights an' Ladies an' jine the Kings an' Queens, but I's tellin' you this: it's yo' juty to b'long to whichever o' them lodges is the mostest good. An' even a fool kin tell which that is."

"You sho' is spittin' out de trufe, an' you's spittin' it out fas' an' furious," declared Big Gun.

"Now, as I wuz jes' tellin' you gen'muns," continued Cuthbert. "They ain't no other lodge in the worl' whut gives its deseasted membahs sech gran' fun'rals lak'n to whut ouhs does. Now, jes' look at that picture. Jes' look at it!"

The Grand Exalted International Organizer proffered a photograph of a lengthy procession. At least two bands were plainly visible. "An' they's three mo' back whuh you can't see 'em," explained Cuthbert.

"Whuh is de hearse at? I can't see de hearse," complained Goodtimes Harris.

"The hearse is back still mo' fu'ther yit. All them peoples whut's in the ca'iges an' which you can't see is the bigger officers o' the lodge. I's in that fus' ca'ige on the fron' seat, but I don' show in the picture. After them ca'iges comes the lesser officers o' the 'vestment depahtment."

"But I done thought the ca'iges wuz behime the hearse in fun'rals," put in Goodtimes agaiñ.

The Honorable Cuthbert fixed the slender, sportily dressed negro with a stare. When he spoke his voice carried to all parts of the saloon.

"The Kings and Queens Order of the Shinin' Stars of the Milky Way," declared he, "is a live organization. One of its motters is the fas' befo' the slow, an' the livin' bein' the mo' fas' than the daid, the livin' allus gits the fus' place in our fun'ral processions."

Goodtimes nodded. "Uhuh! Dat 'pears to be de right way, too. Ev'ybody gwine be standin' dah astin' deyse'f when is de corpse gwine come along, an' dey gwine be sho' to see you if'n you's one o' de live membahs."

"Prezac'ly, Brudder Goodtimes—prezac'ly. That's the mos' mainest idea. Now, disyeah picture wuz taken o' one o' the fun'r'al processions of a very lowly membah, an' you sees fo' yo'se'f whut it is. The mo' high a membah stan's, the mo' bigger is his fun'r'al."

The photograph certainly showed *some* procession. There was no denying that. Cuthbert was proud of that picture. He wasn't exactly sure what the procession was which was shown thereon, but it was a large one, and that was enough. He had found the picture where some one dropped it on St. Charles Street in New Orleans, and it had made an instantaneous hit with him.

The Grand Exalted was very proud of his arrangement of the funeral—placing the living before the dead—and every one in the place liked it; every one except Pete. He liked nothing which had to do with Cuthbert.

He felt positive that there was something wrong about this well-fed negro, who wore such loud and flashy clothes, and whose cable-like watch-chain wended its glistening way across a striped vest of ample proportions.

Pete knew that here was fraud rampant—and he knew something else, and that was that by the time the other negroes discovered this fraud the Knights and Ladies of the Guiding Light would be smashed to smithereens and Pete's glory ground in the dust.

And then Cuthbert spied Pete. The Grand Exalted International Organizer walked over to the old man. "Brudder Pete, you's been down heah in thisyeah country a long time, ain't you?"

Pete's old back straightened. The Honorable Cuthbert had now broached a subject on which Pete could converse for hours without stopping.

"Yassah, sho' is. Been down heah in Honduras gwine on twenty-five yeahs.

Been right heah since even when dey wa'n't no Tela. Knows ev'ybody, an' ev'body knows me. Mah name is Pete Presley, but mos' fo'ks calls me Slave'y Time Pete, an' dem whut don' call me dat, calls me jes' Pete."

Cuthbert smiled. "Uhuh! I sees. An' you of co'se is gwine come in us's lodge? As I understan's it, there ain't gwine be no Knights an' Ladies o' the Guidin' Light after all the membahs o' that lodge gits into the Kings an' Queens, an' I's suah you's gwine to want to be with the yuth-ers."

Cuthbert appeared lost in thought for a moment. "I's sorry that I can't offer you a official position in the lodge us is organizin', but all them positions is taken. Brudder Big Gun heah is gwine be the biggest man in the lodge—he's gwine be Mos' High an' Exalted Shinin' Triple Star. That's the mos' high office whut they is in a subo'dinate lodge."

Pete shook his head. "I ain't wantin' to jine."

"I ain't suah us wants Pete in us's lodge," declared Big Gun. "Us kin run dis lodge widout Pete buttin' in. Let him keep his ol' Knights an' Ladies o' the Guidin' Light if'n he wants to. He kin be de whole lodge by hisse'f."

Without a word Pete turned and stalked from the room. Outside, his prize-fighter friend, Kid Scoot, joined him. Pete turned to his friend. "You ain't let dat crooked niggah hook you in on his scheme, is you, Kid?"

Kid shook his head. "No—I ain't put in mah application, not yit. But de Gran' Salted sho' do make mos' promisin' talk wid his mouf."

Pete snorted. "Dat's all he do make—promisin' talk wid his mouf. No-o, he's makin' sumthin' else—he's makin' fools out'n all dem niggahs: dat's whut he's doin'. Dat niggah's crooked—dat's whut he is."

Pete paused and stared at the ground. After a little he spoke again. "How much money is dat niggah done taken in fum dese Tela fools?"

Kid thought for a moment. "Fum whut I heahs, dey's about a hund'ed an'

fifty whut's put in applications. Application fees is two dollahs per each when you makes de application, an' three dollahs mo' when you jines. Dey gwine jine to-night. Den when dey gits jined to-night dey's sev'ral whut's gwine make 'vestments anywhuh fum five dollahs to one hund'ed dollahs. But Salted Cuthbert ain't takin' no 'vestments till de jinin' is all done thoo-wid. Den dey's gwine finish it all up—'vestments an' all."

Pete grunted. "Dat's whut *he* gwine do; finish 'em up. An' *he*'s gwine finish 'em good an' plenty. I got dis to say fo' him, anyhow. Any niggah whut kin come down heah an' git three hund'ed dollahs out'n deseyeah niggahs befo' he even gits stahted to takin' good is gwine prove to be some finisher when dat time comes."

Pete shook his head sadly. "Dat niggah is a crook, Kid. Dey ain't no doubt 'bout it. An' I sho' wishes I could show him up befo' he bustes mah lodge up untirely. I ain't carin' nothin' 'bout de little 'mount o' two dollahs per each he is done got fum dese niggahs. Dey ought to lose dat fo' not havin' no mo' sense. But I'd sho' like to keep him fum gittin' any mo'. Dat niggah is got sumthin' behime him somewhuh whut I sho' would lak to fin' out."

Kid shrugged. "Mebbe so you's right, but he sho' kin tawk gran'."

Pete sniffed. "Tawk! Tawk! Whut do dat 'mount to? Any crooked niggah kin tawk. Dey's sumthin' 'bout dat niggah whut ain't straight, an' if'n I jes' knowned whut it wuz in time I could keep de Knights an' Ladies o' de Guidin' Light fum bein' busted up."

Kid Scoot nodded. "Sho'. If'n you could show him up, de niggah's 'd all be glad to stay in yo' lodge."

Pete said nothing for some time. Finally he spoke: "But how in de devil is I gwine show him up? Dat's de question dat's worryin' me right now."

For a short while both negroes were silent. Kid Scoot broke the silence. "Yondeh is Mistuh Phil Rozier standin' up dah at de corner. I think he called you, Pete."

Old Pete raised his head and saw Phil

Rozier, a clerk in the fruit company's offices, standing watching him. The old man grinned. "Call me, Mistuh Rozier?"

The white man nodded. "Yes. Come here. I want to talk to you."

Pete turned to Kid. "I gwine see you later, Kid. I got to go see whut Mistuh Rozier wants wid me." Then as he moved forward: "I's comin', boss man—I's comin'!"

The Suriname was just pulling alongside the dock. Old Pete, hat in hand, his bald head shining in the soft glow of the late afternoon sun, was standing beside a banana-car watching the passengers gathered around on deck preparatory to leaving the steamer.

"Huh!" grunted the old negro. "Dat's one sho' pleasant-lookin' man wid dat red mustache. He's smilin' lak de mawnin' sunshine. I espec' heah's whuh I gwine make mahse'f a dollah o' so."

When the pleasant-faced man's foot struck the dock, Pete was at his side. "Boss man, whuh you's gwine at?"

The mustached man smiled. "I'm going to the hotel—if there's one here."

Pete grinned. "Yassuh, dey's one heah, but I don't espec' it's much hotel; but it's de onliest one us is got. Boss, I gwine show you de way. An' if'n you ain't in no hurry, us 'll go by de customs-house an' git yo' baggage thoo. Got any trunks?"

"No; just two suit-cases. They'll have to go through the customs—"

"Yassuh. Sho' will, but dat's easy. Let's me an' you go 'long, an' I gwine show you how to git thoo de customs-house in a hurry. Dey gwine take all de baggage over on dat train dah, an' it 'll be dah soon as us kin walk over. Us can't ride on it."

Before half the distance to the customs-house was covered Pete decided that this smiling man was his sort of white folks. The man liked to talk, and he liked to hear Pete talk.

"Many American negroes down here?" the white man asked finally.

Pete shook his head. "Not many—twenty-five, I reckons. But dah's lots o'

West Indian niggahs—calls deyse'ves British objec's. An'—"

But the white man was speaking, and as he spoke Pete listened. And as Pete listened, Pete thought—

When the newcomer had been safely lodged in his room, baggage and all, Pete, with a satisfactory tip in his pocket, bade him a temporary farewell. The old man then hurried off to find Kid Scoot. Kid was finally located on the beach, talking to a member of the crew of the sailing schooner Bluebird.

Pete grabbed Kid by the arm. "Come long wid me, Kid, I's got sumthin' 'pawtant to tell you."

The Honorable Cuthbert Mendenhall, Big Gun, and Goldtooth Cotton were sitting around a table in the railroad saloon, when Pete entered.

Cuthbert glanced at his watch. "Quah-ter pas' seven, gen'muns. Us 'll soon have to be gittin' to the lodge-rooms."

Pete walked over and touched Goldtooth Cotton on the arm. "Lean over heah, Goldtooth," Pete requested in a loud, hoarse whisper.

"Whut you wants?" Goldtooth demanded.

"Does you know ary niggah round heah whut's named Harry Small?"

Goldtooth shook his head. "No. Why do you ask?"

Out of the corner of one eye Pete saw the Honorable Cuthbert straighten in his chair. Then he turned back to Goldtooth. "Dey's a white gen'mun whut jes' got in fum de States on de Suriname. He's a 'TECTIVE, an' he's lookin' fo' dat niggah, Harry Small. Dey's a big reward fo' him. You mout 'a' seed de white man. He's a pleasant gen'mun, wid a mustache. Me an' him walked fum de boat to de hotel."

Goldtooth frowned. "No; I don' know nobody named Harry Small. Whut he done?"

Pete shook his head. "De white man ain't tol' me. But he say dat he onderstan' de man he's lookin' fo' is down heah somewuhuh."

Cuthbert rose from the table. "I got to go down the street, gen'muns. I'll be

back in a minute or so. If'n I ain't, y' all jes' go on down to the lodge."

The would-be members of the Kings and Queens of the Shining Stars of the Milky Way were becoming impatient. The hour was nine thirty, and the Grand Exalted International Organizer had not shown up. As the initiation exercises were to have opened by not later than eight o'clock, some of those who had paid two dollars "per each" with their applications were beginning to mutter things under their breath when Kid Scoot and Pete entered the room.

"Seen the Gran' Salted?" Goldtooth Cotton wanted to know.

"I seed him," said Kid, grinning.

"Whuh is he at?" half a dozen wanted to know.

Kid chuckled. "Right now he's se'val miles fum heah on de Bluebird, boun' fo' Nicaragua. De Hon'ble Cuthbert is done flew de coop."

"De rascal!" roared Big Gun. "How you knows dat, Kid?"

Kid laughed. "Seed him git on de boat an' seed de boat pull out. Dat's how I knows."

"An' us's money is gone!" yelled Goldtooth.

Pete laughed. "Tell 'em 'bout it, Kid."

Kid commenced emptying his pockets on a table. "Yo' money ain't gone. Heah it is heah. But it wuz almos' gone—dat an' a lot mo' you fool niggahs wuz gwine give him if'n de Gran' Salted hadn't 'cided dis wuz a good time to lef' fum heah."

"But how'd you git de money?"

Kid grinned. "Yo' money had done stahted 'way fum heah wid Mistuh Mendenhall, but down dah at de beach it done balked an' wouldn't go no fu'der wid him. Pete heah tipped me off dat he didn't think Cuthbert wuz honest, an' wuz gwine try to git 'way—so I wuz down dah on de beach waitin' fo' him, when he rushed down to git on de Bluebird."

Kid placed the last balky dollar on the table. "Dat's all o' y'all's money. It sho' balked easy. I had a little conversation wid Cuthbert, an' on'y had to use mah fis'

one time, when de money commenced balkin' quite rapid."

Kid glanced around the room. "An' I thinks you niggahs is all gwine stick to de Knights an' Ladies o' de Guidin' Light now, bein's Pete is de one whut got nex' to dat niggah's crookedness."

Pete stooped and patted his dog Bones on the head. Then taking a key from his pocket, he unlocked the door to his little house and he and Kid Scoot entered.

Pete was grinnin'. "Take yo'se'f a cheer, Kid."

Kid found a chair while Pete was lighting a smoky oil-lamp.

Finally Pete turned to his guest. "Now I gwine tell you all 'bout it, Kid, since you been pesterin' me evah since I fus' off asted you to be on de beach in case dem dollars de Hon'ble Cuthbert wuz tryin' to git 'way wid needed any balkin'. Fus' off—you membahs to-day when Mistuh Rozier called me?"

Kid nodded. "I sho' does."

Pete reached over on a rickety table and picked up an old cob pipe. Feeling in his pockets for a few tobacco crumbs, he continued:

"Mistuh Rozier knowed whut de Gran' Salted wuz tryin' to do, an' lak me he thought he wuz crooked. So when he got to lookin' th'oo a New 'Leans paper whut come down heah a few days ago, an' foun' whuh a niggah whut give his name as Harry Small had been tryin' to 'establish Kings and Queens lodges in sev'al places in de States, an' had to make hisse'f skeerce on account he wuz gwine be 'rested, he 'cided dat de Hon'ble Cuthbert mus' be Harry Small. Mistuh Rozier also

wuz made mo' sho' of dat fum de excription o' Harry Small in de paper."

Kid laughed. "Dem niggahs sho' is gwine stick to de Knights an' Ladies o' de Guidin' Light fum now on, Pete."

Neither of the two men spoke for a few seconds. Then Kid broke the silence: "But you know, dey couldn't take Harry Small back to de States to try him fo' nothin' he done up dah. Dis country ain't got no 'tradition treaty wid de States."

Pete grinned. "Dat wa'n't whut wuz worryin' de Hon'ble Cuthbert. He wa'n't figgerin' *nothin'* out. He knowed he wuz Harry Small an' dat somebody knowed Harry Small wuz heah, an' I 'low dat he figgered if'n he wuz round heah when Big Gun an' dem yuthers got on to whut he'd been doin' in de States, an' wuz fixin' to do to dem, he'd be reel lucky to git in jail."

Pete held out his hand. "Gimme a match, Kid."

Kid handed the old man a match. "But whut 'bout dat 'tective you tol' Goldtooth 'bout, an' which Cuthbert overhearn you tellin' him. If'n dey wouldn't come heah after Harry Small, how come de 'tective—"

Pete laughed heartily. "Oh, yes, dat smilin' white gen'mun. You know, Kid, dat sho's one mo' intrustin' white man to talk wid—he's sho' 'nough quality fo'ks, but I—you see, Kid, I needed a 'tective in mah business, an' fo' mah purpose dat white man wuz jes' as good as any yuther. Us talked a whole heap, but he ain't tol' me who he is or whut he does. An—"

Pete's face assumed an expression as solemn as that of an owl: "I don' know whut dat man's business is. He may be a hoss doctah fo' all I knows."

## A BOND MAN

**O**F the interminable turmoil of the town  
I tire, and long to leave its sordid ills  
For the free freshness of the open down,  
The unobstructed largeness of the hills.

Yet, having won unto my heart's desire—  
The outland air, the upland liberty—  
I hear a voice whilst the blue hours expire;  
The city calls, and will not let me be!

Clinton Scollard.

# The Caravan of the Dead

by Harold Lamb

Author of "Marching Sands," "The Sunwise Turn," etc.

"The stars are setting, and the caravan  
Starts for the dawn of Nothing. O, make haste!"

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE VULTURE GLOATS.

BY and by Monsey noticed the evidence of dawn. He buttoned his jacket at the throat and beckoned her.

"Come! You can see now."

Her limbs stiff with cold, Edith followed him out into the still more desolate entrance-chamber of the castle hold. Gray light from the embrasures illuminated it. She saw a roughly made ladder of saplings resting against the massive sandstone of the wall. Up this Monsey motioned her to climb.

He followed the girl into a square hole in the ceiling. Rotting timbers on the floor below afforded evidence that once a stairway had penetrated where the ladder led. They stood in a very small, dark space.

"The first floor of the tower itself," explained Monsey. "Go on."

A winding stair, broken down in places and illuminated only by thin arrow slits in the wall, conducted them to the tower top—a nest of tumbled cedar timbers.

Edith looked out upon the dawn.

Mountain ranges were tipped by vivid, ruddy light. The ravine below was in darkness. The courtyard of the *kurgan* was a gray square with shadowy corners.

"Look," said Monsey, pointing downward.

On one side of the enclosure some fifty horses were lined, with piles of forage at

either end of the line. On the other side, the roofless shelters and the open clay of the court itself were filled with sleeping men. Along the walls several sentries paced.

In the darkness, close to midnight, when they had arrived at the castle, Edith had noticed little of this. She had supposed that the only men in the *kurgan* were those who had been in Monsey's raiding party. Now she realized that the place sheltered no fewer than two hundred or more.

Monsey pointed out a dozen rifle stacks before the shelters.

"A company of soldiers," he whispered. "Tartars, who were once part of the Turkish army. They know that I am a leader who rewards his men. They came with me from the Caucasus region—waited around Khokand. Look there!"

He indicated a huddle of figures in sheep-skin coats and black hats, each one sleeping with a musket in hand, their dark faces upturned to the sky.

"Alamans, who came with Abbas from Kashgar. And, at the foot of the tower wandering Kurds, and Turkomans—all armed. The Tartars have Mauser rifles, with magazines."

The men were sprawled about the clay, around some ashes of fires, between piles of littered garments, bags of grain, some stacks of women's silk garments, and an occasional heap of copper and silver vessels, candlesticks, and glittering cloths.

"All good Mohammedans," said Monsey, complacently.

"Then why are not they at sunrise prayers?" demanded Edith coldly, remembering the custom of the devout Moslems of Yahka Arik.

"Prayers?" Monsey stared at her in some surprise. "Oh, my fellows are well enough. They are Mohammedans now, because they are on a religious mission. If need be, I dare say they could be Jainists or other things—anything but Sayaks, sun-worshippers. Every Mohammedan hates a Sayak. Now, look there."

Below the wall on the side away from the cliff Edith could see that the moat had been dug out to a greater depth. In it was a tangle of dead tree branches, with many pointed stakes uprising from the ground.

"A lesson of the war," laughed the Russian. "Openings in the wall command that cursed ditch. My men could dig there without being seen because it is below the level of the surrounding ground. Oh, they made a good job of it—after one or two of the lazy Tartars had the soles of their feet touched up a bit by Abbas. Now why don't you ask how they got here?"

Edith was silent.

"Well," he went on, pleased with his own cleverness, "you'll notice those *nullahs* to the south. They lead, in a roundabout fashion, to Kashgar, I brought in my fellows, fifty or so at a time, at night. No one saw them. Only a dozen riders have been seen by the Sayak devils."

As a matter of fact, the wooded ravines running between the heights that led to the great southern peaks of the Himalayas might have afforded shelter to many times that number. To the west, facing the prepared trench, was a level plain of some size, rocky at the further end, and leading to broken, rolling woodland, beyond which lay Yahka Arik. At a distance, on all sides, were the mountains.

Nothing could be seen from here of Yahka Arik, the village, fields, or lake. Edith fancied as the sun topped the peaks behind them, that she could recognize the snow summit of *Mus-tagh-ata* standing against the dawn in the direction of Kashgar, across the river's gorge.

"You see, I've studied the defenses of this place, my lady," grinned the Russian. "I've been here before, and by the beard of Allah and Satan's hoof, I didn't want to come here again without a bodyguard."

At that, Edith drew a quick breath, recalling the tale of Iskander. So Monsey had been the Russian who raided Yahka Arik! But her companion saw no reason for further concealment.

"You don't understand it all yet, my American." He paused, at a sound from below, and went on in an altered tone: "You were necessary to our plans. The Sayaks will follow you because you know the secret of their mosque. Abbas and I know that, too, and when the Sayaks realize we're here, they will fall the more easily into our trap, the Abbas and I will settle the reckoning with our enemies. Oh, I know those fanatics: their fighting men will attack this castle like mad dogs, thinking only a score of men are here. Then they will find themselves in a pretty mess." I wonder why they haven't tried it already. My outposts haven't seen anything."

Three or four scattered groups were stationed on knolls in the plateau. Monsey waved his hand at them, and Abbas grinned.

"Now you understand, my lady. When we have killed off the armed men of those brigands we'll move against the valley. And there won't be so many to kill, at that. Besides some Arabs and a handful of Afghans, those Sayaks are not much use in a fight. They do not number a hundred able-bodied men. Then we will take care of the mosque."

Abbas stretched powerful arms.

"Spoil," he grunted, "gold—ev'ryt'ing, by Allah. *Maiili barlik!*"

"I thought," Edith faced Monsey, "you came to Yahka Arik because my father sent you to rescue me."

Monsey scowled, then shrugged.

"Why keep up the appearance, *mademoiselle*? I must have something to pay my men—"

"And yourself!"

"Yes," he said softly, "myself." He nodded at Abbas. "This merchant needs new goods—"

"I thought slaves were a thing of the past."

"Not in Central Asia to-day. Gold is power, and women are gold. So much for Abbas. I tell you, I am leader here. And I only came for you." He touched a strand of her hair. "Do you think I would tell you all this if I was not sure of my cards? I want you to understand how you are fixed—with only my word to keep you from these men. Think about it. You won't be so haughty, then." He paused as the Alaman touched his arm and thrust a stocky forefinger out at the plateau. "Now who is that?"

From the rocks at the further end of the level space a figure was advancing toward the castle. Edith saw that it was John Donovan.

He had taken only a few steps before a patrol challenged, and he halted while a pair of riflemen examined him. Presently the trio began to walk back to the *kurgan*. Donovan wore a sun-helmet, and was immaculate in his flannels and white jacket beside the short, dingy natives.

Edith had rejoiced at sight of the man she loved, moving toward her out of the wilderness of rocks. Her heart beat a brief refrain of exultation. Then she bit her lip, and repressed a cry of distress.

Apparently Donovan was unarmed. He seemed to take no notice of the two guards. The light of the newly risen sun was dead in his eyes. And he was coming straight into the trap Monsey had set for him and the Sayaks.

The Russian himself was more than a little surprised. Quickly he scanned the near-by woods beyond the rocks, where there was no sign of further movement. "An Englishman, that's certain," he muttered to himself. "No one else would walk or dress like that—here. Now who?"—he glanced at Edith, then peered at the visitor. "By the head of the Prophet: it's Donovan himself, without a beard. I didn't know him at first. Look here!" He gripped the girl's arm viciously. "Silence, you hear? Not a word out of you! Or I'll order my men to shoot him down. Besides that, Abbas may skewer you with his cursed knife on his own account."

He flung a word at the Alaman, and scrambled toward the stair.

"I'm going to welcome the *khan* who is your friend," he called over his shoulder to Edith, and disappeared. She heard him mutter something about his "holy luck." Abbas drew nearer her.

The girl stared at Donovan in utter dismay. He had looked up, coolly, at the tower, but appeared not to recognize her. The guards had halted him a few paces from the ditch. She wanted to call to him, to warn him. But she feared—not for herself—that it would be fatal.

Presently Monsey appeared, going down the entrance steps. She watched him join the group and search his visitor for weapons. After a moment Donovan drew a handkerchief from his pocket and one of the men secured it about his eyes. Then Monsey guided the blindfolded man up the steps, across the courtyard, where the awakened natives stared at them curiously, and into the *kurgan* hold.

An explanation of Donovan's appearance flashed upon her. He had reasoned that Monsey would not know him; perhaps, even, her protector was unaware that Monsey was in the castle. He must have hoped that Abbas and his men would not connect the arrival of a well-dressed Englishman with the Sayaks.

And she had unwittingly revealed the identity of the white man at Yahka Arik to Monsey. Knowing the Russian, she understood how great was the peril into which Donovan had walked unarmed. Her heart told her why he had come.

It all seemed perfectly hopeless to Edith. She had been comforting herself throughout the night with the thought that Donovan, somehow, would manage to aid her. Abbas signed to her.

"You come," he grinned. "Don' you talk. No, by God!"

His hand moved swiftly to his girdle, and Edith caught the flash of steel. In the same instant, the knife thudded into a beam, across the stairs. The Alaman tugged it out, with a meaning glance at her. He laid his hand on the beam.

"Dono-van Khan," he answered her.

The girl passed down the stairs with

Abbas behind her. For this reason she did not see, across the ravine, a horseman riding at full gallop along the cliff path toward the south, away from Yahka Arik. It was a native, his long cloak fluttering, bending close to the horse and riding as no one but a hill-bred native could ride. And she heard nothing because, although the opposite cliff was within easy rifle range, Monsey had given strict orders to his sentries not to shoot until he gave the order so that the firing might not reveal the secret of the trap he had set so cleverly with the assistance of Abbas.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

#### MONSEY SHOWS HIS CARDS.

A RICKETY table had been drawn against the wall of the teakwood room. On two boxes, facing each other across this table, sat John Donovan and Monsey. A guard stood at the door. Near the stove Edith had seated herself, with Abbas at her side.

"And so you want to know what I am doing with this woman in the castle?" Monsey stroked his mustache complacently and surveyed his visitor. Donovan had hardly looked at Edith. He sat erect, hands clasped over crossed knees. He had been released from the bandage, and his tranquil gaze searched the opposite wall, without in the least attempting to watch his enemy.

"Well, I will tell you." Monsey rested solid shoulders against the teakwood, his nervous hand straying about the revolver-holster. "It's none of your damn business."

Lower lip thrust out, eyes narrowed, he surveyed Donovan. Monsey also had guessed that his enemy had come to the *kurgan* hoping that he would not be recognized.

"Suppose," ventured Donovan, choosing his speech with care, "I should make it so?"

"Oh, fine words. Tell me who you are and what you want."

He smiled, hoping to hear Donovan lie. It rather grieved the Russian that the other had shown no surprise at seeing him. Mon-

sey had fancied his visitor would be startled, afraid. So he struck his hand on his thigh loudly and raised his voice.

"I tell you, I am master here."

Donovan shook his fair head ever so slightly, seemed to be about to answer, then thought better of it. His reticence annoyed Monsey, whose nerves were none of the best after a sleepless night.

"Really?" remarked Donovan at length.

"The sooner you understand that, the better for you, I say. And you'd do well to be civil. Now, once more, who are you and what is your business here?"

Monsey's tone showed his disappointment at the talk. He had expected to overbear and cow the man who had walked into his stronghold. Donovan, slender, clean-shaven, dressed in clothing obviously cut once upon a time by a good tailor, although now much washed and darned, looked very slight beside the heavier man. His was the self-possession of good breeding and the calmness of one who through long contact with the Orient has acquired the impersonal fatalism of this other world.

"I intend to marry this woman," he said. "I have come for my wife."

For the first time he looked Edith in the face, and her eyes flew to his. Monsey stared, his mouth opening slightly.

"Marry?" He saw his chance to touch Donovan. "Oh, I suppose you must, after—"

"If she consents."

Donovan was still looking at the girl. When she would have spoken, Abbas shook her shoulder. At this the visitor's eyes hardened, although his face did not change. Meanwhile Monsey had tired of trying to play with his victim.

"Oh, you're a very clever gentleman, Mr. Donovan Khan. I've heard that you have an uncle who is a minister of God and a father who is a knight. They'll be proud of you—when they learn you have joined company with infidels and the scum of Yahka Arik. You didn't think I knew you, but Miss Rand told me all about you."

"I didn't mean to," the girl cried, despite Abbas's warning mutter.

Donovan raised his brows.

"My father is dead." He faced Mon-

sey, speaking very slowly. "I have come for Miss Rand. Shall I tell you why?"

He had not seemed taken aback by the knowledge that Monsey knew him. Edith wondered whether, after all, Donovan had not expected this. If so, he had been foolhardy in coming. She did not understand.

"You, Monsey and this man Abbas Abad," he went on, "are marked down by the Sayaks. You know the belief of the Moslems that each criminal has, in heaven, a stone marked with his name that will one day fall upon him no matter where he is. The Sayaks have condemned you to death; there will be fighting before long. You cannot leave the tower. I wish to take Edith away from danger,"

Monsey broke into a long laugh.

"Oh, you are a fool. I like to hear you talk. Well, Edith Rand won't go away. She will stay with me. Is that clear?"

A slight shrug answered him.

"I wanted to give you the chance, Monsey, to play the gentleman, you know."

The Russian flushed, biting his mustache. He watched Donovan draw an object carefully from his pocket. It was a heavy jade necklace of many folds, set with some inferior turquoise. Donovan laid it on the table, rolled into a ball.

"You remember this?" His words were crisp. "Well, perhaps Abbas does. It belonged to the wife of Iskander Ibn Tahir. He bought it back, in the Kashgar bazaar. And he has kept it. You know the fate in store for a man who violates the home of an Arab of high birth?" While he spoke, he put his hand on the necklace. Monsey's eyes widened a little, and he licked his full lips. Then he shook his head.

"Not good enough. You can't bluff me."

"I am not bluffing. Nor am I warning you! Whatever happens to Miss Rand, your life is forfeit. It is beyond me."

So calmly he spoke, he seemed to be explaining the inevitable. Edith felt this, and Monsey was silent a space. As if finished with the business of the necklace, Donovan tossed it, still rolled tightly, into Edith's lap, a distance of a scant two yards.

"Presents from such men as Iskander have a meaning," he said.

Donovan had not looked at her. Monsey took the words to himself, but the girl glanced up with awakened curiosity. Abbas would have taken the necklace, but the Englishman turned to him sharply.

"Mahmoud is coming for you, Abbas," he said in Turki. "Are you ready?"

The simple speech caused the Alaman to draw a long breath and to step back instinctively. Edith wondered whether it was surprise at being addressed in his own tongue. But she remembered the fear that had flashed into the face of the Sart upon the mountainside. The name of the physician seemed to carry a potent spell.

Monsey had been startled just enough to anger him. It occurred to him that Donovan, entirely in his power, was taking the upper hand of the situation. Meanwhile Edith drew the necklace under her lace shawl. Here her quick fingers explored its folds tentatively.

She felt a piece of paper, crumpled within the jade ornaments. Eagerly, she separated the wad of paper from the necklace and thrust it into the bosom of her dress.

When the ornament of the wife of Iskander fell again to her lap it revealed nothing but the stones, strung on a gold chain. Abbas later claimed it, with an eye to spoil.

"You are more of a fool than I thought, Mr. Donovan Khan. My star is high, Abbas said. Well, I am grateful for your help. Have you any more cards to show?"

Donovan turned to him earnestly.

"I do not need to conceal my cards, Monsey. Believe it, or not, the Sayaks hold you fast. Your men have heard of them, and they are afraid. You know the fear that centers about Yahka Arik?"

Sure of himself again, Monsey laughed. He rose, motioning the other to come to the door. There he pointed through the outer entrance that gave on the courtyard.

"Oh, I know the legends. Maybe if I had only a handful of men"—he shrugged—"but look out there!"

He watched, pleased, as Donovan stiffened and drew an involuntary breath at sight of the numbers in the *kurgan* and their weapons.

"You see. Likewise, the old moat on the side away from the cliff is dug out into

a man-trap. Also, I have had great pine flares made, ready to light in case of a night attack. *Vous voyez que je suis en garde.* Naturally, I don't intend to let you leave with this valuable information."

"In spite of your assurance, given me outside the castle?"

"Oh, that. Well, I wanted to let your men who were watching from the woods think you and I were on friendly terms." Monsey's lips writhed and his hand darted to his weapon as Donovan made a quick move toward him. "Stay where you are, my fine gentleman. Now, have you any more cards to show?"

Donovan seemed disheartened at the vista of the *kurgan*. His lips closed firmly under the light mustache. Edith, watching him prayerfully, felt her heart sink.

"I think—not."

"Ah. That is too bad. You have given me a good trump." He grinned, once more enjoying himself. "You are worth more to me alive than dead. And so is Miss Rand. Do you think your assassin friends will attack the tower with the two of you helpless in my hands?"

The lines in Donovan's lean face deepened. "I don't think—I know it."

"Even if they are led to believe I will kill the woman when they attack?"

"It would not change their purpose." Donovan flung out an eloquent hand. "Don't you see, man! Those Sayaks will come, in spite of everything. The *kurgan* will be a shambles. That is why I came here. On the chance that you, who were once a Russian nobleman, would have enough vestige of honor to spare her that. It doesn't matter, you know, what you do with me if you will release her."

Monsey relished his distress. He stepped back, still fingering his heavy revolver.

"Oh, I can't afford to play the saint—now." He hesitated as if wishing to say more. Then his eyes gleamed and he smiled. "Besides, I can't afford to."

Edith glanced at him inquiringly. She had been aroused by the scene at the table, where Monsey's character was laid bare, brutally. Even now, she could not believe that Donovan, in whom she trusted, was powerless.

"Mr. Rand and Major Fraser-Carnie are approaching these hills," said Monsey agreeably. "They have an escort of a half-troop of one of the native English cavalry. It seems the gentlemen, after comparing notes, did not trust me."

He paused, enjoying the effect of his words. Donovan, although showing no surprise, was paying careful attention and he understood now the reference of the Sayaks to the friends of Edith. The girl gave a cry of joy.

"Unfortunately," continued the Russian, "they will arrive too late."

Edith clenched her hands. Her father was near Yahka Arik! She had felt that he would come, if he were able. It was not in the nature of Arthur Rand to leave his daughter's fate in other hands.

"English troopers in foreign territory." Monsey shook his head. "A grave offense, if any serious fighting results. The—ah—irregulars here might resent it."

"It's a habit," observed Donovan mildly, "of the English border forces to wander to the scene of a crime."

"Once you paid high for that—habit, and you will pay more."

"Oh, it's in the race. We always blunder in, you know." Donovan smiled a little. "So the major and his Garhwalis are in the hills! As a matter of curiosity, do you intend to face him with your—irregulars?"

Monsey tugged at his mustache, and glanced at Abbas.

"No need, my fine gentleman. As you are a former officer, and a scion of a *noble house*"—he tried to mimic the Englishman's irony—"you will appreciate the strength of my position. My friends in Kashgar notified me that the force was at that city. Something learned in the bazaars must have put them on the road here. I don't think they will arrive before a day or two. Meanwhile the lawless Sayaks will assault a Russian traveler and a peaceful merchant in their camp—to the great loss of the Sayaks. Then, of course, there will be some justifiable reprisals by my men."

"Entirely to be expected."

"You take the point. Merely one of the mountain feuds, if the worthy drill-book major tries to ask questions. The

mosque may suffer, likewise the lawless residents of Yahka Arik. But I will not be here nor will Miss Rand.

"And my father?" Edith voiced her anxiety.

"If he is curious he will be told by some of these natives"—Monsey nodded at the door—"that a certain renegade Britisher named Donovan Khan has disappeared with her. Of course *Captain* Donovan will not be here to cause further trouble. The ravine, to the river, is very deep."

"Five hundred feet, I think," nodded Donovan.

"Exactly. I see you are not altogether a fool. Presently, you will be able to judge for yourself."

"I regret that I could not climb the cliff."

"Oh, yes. I believe you. I took pains to investigate that. No, I think you are better apart—so!" Edith had crept to Donovan's side and taken his hand in hers. She was very near the verge of tears. Monsey thrust her aside while Abbas grinned. "That is well. Now Donovan Khan, I will ask you to let your hands be bound behind your back and submit to an armed guard, in a corner of this outer room."

"Let me stay with him," Edith pleaded. She felt very weak, very helpless. She wondered why Donovan was so quiet.

"The air in the tower will benefit you. In case you should want to converse, my lady, I will provide you with another of my men. He will have orders."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### AN HOUR AFTER DARK.

IT was some time before Edith remembered the crumpled paper concealed in her dress. Then she surveyed her surroundings cautiously. She was in the chamber on the first tier of the tower. An Alaman sat apathetically on the wooden steps over the aperture that led below.

The footfalls of the sentry guarding Donovan below reached her ears. The Englishmán himself was not visible. Nor was Edith permitted to look down from the opening in the floor. Anxiously she felt

for the bit of paper, drawing near to one of the embrasures.

The guard, leaning against his rifle, kept only an indifferent watch upon her as she slipped the paper into a fold of her scarf where she could see it, and smoothed out the wrinkles tenderly. It took some time before this careful maneuver revealed the whole of the missive to the girl. She saw a small square of worn paper closely written in pencil. Eagerly, with hearing attuned for the approach of Monsey or Abbas, she read:

#### DEAREST GIRL:

It took hours to persuade Iskander from launching an immediate assault on the castle. I won my point—a chance to get to you. The Sayaks will attack the night after I reach you. I had no other way of helping you, but this. An hour after sunset, try to be at the eastern wall, nearest the cliff. Aravang will make the attempt at the cliff. He is a regular mountain sheep, and none of the other Sayaks would dare it. I don't think A. would, for me. But he will for you. He will bring my revolver. Take it, if he can't make the climb into the *kurgan* wall, which is unlikely. Try to reach me with the weapon if you can. If not, use it as you may, and God wills. Watch out for the sentries on the rampart. Monsey stations two there, I think, as he does not fear an attack from that side. Nothing will keep the Sayaks from a frontal attack, although I have talked my head off trying to make them see the sides to the north and south are more accessible. If you can't get to me before the attack, *don't try*. I can look out for myself. Iskander will look for you, perhaps. God watch over you, you blessed woman.

DONOVAN.

If Aravang is not on time, he'll have fallen.

Darkness came less swiftly to the *kurgan* than to the valley of Yahka Arik. Looking from the tower embrasure, Edith could see the splendid curtains of sunset drawing about a glowing orb that fired the snow peaks with its life.

The aspect of the mountains, as shadows formed in the ravines and crept up the rock surfaces, reminded the girl of a vase painting—so utterly desolate and so tranquil were these gigantic pinnacles.

It dwarfed her. Since her coming to the valley of the Sayaks Edith had never felt so insignificant. Life itself was a small matter here, she thought—and what was life if Donovan was lost to her?

She knew that he loved her—it had been in his eyes in the temple, and she read the secret between the lines of his letter. His one thought was for her.

Edith wanted to sit down and wait. She was listless, and chilled. Close beside her the Alaman brooded over his rifle, passive as he had been all the day, except to eat once a meal of fermented milk and black bread. The bustle of subdued preparation, hastened in the last light of evening, came to her ears from the courtyard below. She was grateful that this activity had kept Monsey or Abbas from coming to stare at her during the afternoon.

It was with a start that Edith realized Aravang must have begun his climb. The shadowy vapor of the ravine would conceal him, and he could still see after a fashion, to find his way up the face of the cliff, clinging to the crevices and spurs of the almost sheer rock.

"If Aravang is not on time, he'll have fallen."

The sentence returned to her mind with the force of a blow. Aravang was on his way, and she must be prepared to act. She did not know what to do. How was she to reach the rampart over the cliff? Could Aravang, if he survived the climb, gain the interior of the *kurgan*? What could a stupid native and a helpless girl manage to do, against two such men as Monsey and Abbas and their armed followers?

Edith tried to think. They could not return—if escape from the *kurgan* were possible—down the face of the cliff in the dark. Even if it had been possible, she would not leave John Donovan.

Iskander, Donovan had said, might aid her. But Iskander would not gain the interior of the *kurgan* owing to the trap that had been set for the Sayaks. No, Edith could not plan, could not see any way out of the trap. Donovan himself had—so she thought—merely taken a last chance—had done his utmost to protect her until the end that would come with the fighting and the revolver.

Edith found that she was unable to realize the truth of the revolver, the *kurgan*, and her enemies. The whole thing was fantastic, impossible. It was another evil

dream, and she must surely waken. She, Edith Rand, could not be so severed from the reality of that other life of home and Louisville and servants.

Was it possible that two men could have talked as Monsey and Donovan did about her—accepting the inevitability of this other world? Could not her father come to help her, as he had always done?

With this, she understood finally that Arthur Rand could not reach her in time. Monsey's guards would see to it. The American and the English cavalry were scouring the hills without knowing the location of Yahka Arik, not realizing that the Sayaks were in a way her friends, nor aware of the events that were shaping about the *kurgan* that night.

Edith laughed uncertainly, with a twinge of self-pity.

"Daddy," she murmured, "if you could see your one daughter now."

The sentry lifted his head. This movement brought the reality of her situation sharply home to the girl. She heard the steps of the guard below once more. John Donovan had need of her!

And with this thought Edith Rand entered into the heritage of the new world that had been so strange to her. She smiled and her pulse quickened.

Donovan loved her! She would be his wife. What else in her existence was so momentous, so wonderful as this? He was not powerless. He—a trained soldier—had taken the one step that would make it possible for him to fight for her. It was not true that he had been outwitted by Monsey. And Donovan trusted her. He had staked everything on her courage. Well, she would not fail him.

Iskander had said that in this American girl was a weapon of tested steel. And he had judged truly.

Thoughtfully she bound the ends of the shawl about her shoulders, thus leaving her arms free. She faced the Alaman with new intentness. After all, she told herself, the native was a witless ruffian. Edith stepped to the ladder, speaking authoritatively to her guard and drawing upon her small stock of Turkı.

"*Sa'at*," she declared. "It is the time

to start. Take me to"—she pondered swiftly—"Abbas Abad. Abbas, *effendi*."

The man fumbled uneasily with his weapon. He had not expected this, but the white woman seemed to be certain of her purpose. What was he to do? He rose.

She thrust him aside indignantly, with beating heart.

"*Kul!*" Edith cried. "I must go to Abbas—to Abbas."

The man hesitated. He was little better than a slave. Greatly he dreaded punishment and the anger of the higher beings, his superior. And the name of Abbas hinted at both these things. It would be well to take her as she asked, lest the soles of his bare feet be beaten.

Watchfully he climbed down the ladder, motioning her to follow.

It was then that the kindred longing of two hearts came near to defeating the girl's new purpose. Seeing Donovan standing, tied fast by the wrists to the table, brought hither apparently, for this purpose, Edith gave a low cry and ran to him.

Her arms went around his neck and his lips pressed hers swiftly. Breathing quickly, her cheeks aflame and her eyes soft, the girl looked up at him.

Donovan kissed her again, intoxicated by the nearness of this beautiful woman, and more than a little dazed. Her hands touched his rough cheek shyly. The sudden knowledge of Edith's love and the brief possession of her lips were a miracle that rendered him voiceless. Then a rifle stock thrust roughly against his chest.

"Edith!" he whispered. "You must not bother about me. Good luck!"

"Stupid!" she laughed. "I am coming back."

Her Alaman escorted her vigilantly to the door. Lanterns were already lit in the courtyard. Overhead, the crimson of the sky outlined walls and tower. Within a few paces of her, by one of the lights, Abbas was distributing cartridges to a group of men.

"W'at you wan'?" he cried angrily. "Nakir el kadr! You go—"

Edith walked nearer quietly.

"Monsey sent for me—Monsey."

Abbas glanced at her and shrugged his

plump shoulders. He pointed to the entrance to the courtyard.

"The excellency, out there." Monsey was bringing the patrols closer to the walls. "A fool. By God, I am no fool! You stay near: yes, near."

He glanced at the darkening sky and turned irritably to his work. There were certain pine torches to be raised high over the walls. In the daylight these flares had been kept carefully lowered behind the ramparts.

Edith watched a while as slouching Alamans and Tartars received an allotment of cartridges and departed. She drew back a little from the lantern. Abbas, after satisfying himself that she was accompanied by her attendant, did not spare his attention from his task. The girl, he knew, could not escape from the castle.

So Edith attained the first point in her objective, a tumbled pile of stone blocks against the raised walk that ran inside the parapet nearest the cliff. The Alaman stood before her, leaning on his rifle, well content that there had been no beating of his feet.

The eastern wall, together with that of the north and south, was more battered by the weather than that facing the plateau. The parapet was broken at intervals. Edith moved her position casually until she was abreast one of these breaks, and perched herself upon the stone walk that had served as a fire-step before the days when guns and cartridges had been invented.

Here she could look out through a gap in the masonry, and glimpse the dark space that was the ravine. A distant murmur of running water reached her ears. She watched the two sentinels pacing the rampart, and understood why Monsey had not posted a stronger guard.

This side of the *kurgan* was impregnable to attack. A scant dozen feet of steep incline led to the break of the cliff. Below was the five-hundred-foot drop to the river. Edith cast an anxious glance at the western horizon. Only a crimson and purple glow was visible. The sun had set some time ago. Across the dark bulk of the cliff facing her a few stars were visible. In the courtyard, the lanterns had gained full strength.

Dark figures passed between her and the lights. Heavy poles bearing a bundle at their ends were being raised into place. Once she saw Monsey, and instinctively shrank closer into her nest of rocks—although he could not now see her in the dark.

She noticed that the two sentries kept to the corners, at quite a distance. The Alaman, however, was very close, watching her. At times she heard the bull voice of Abbas lowered to a rumble and wondered if he were seeking her. Without her realizing it, the need of preparation engaged the two leaders, so that they had no time to seek her out: Monsey being unaware that she was not in the tower.

Even the numbers in the *kurgan* were not free from the dread that the name of Yahka Arik inspired.

On the cliff edge she heard the sound of a bird fluttering its wings. And then a *chirp*. Again came the *whirr* of wings, like that of a falcon rising, and not until then did Edith realize that Aravang had come and was signaling her. She stiffened and glanced up at the bulk of the Alaman. He had not noticed anything out of the usual.

Whereupon Edith drew closer to the gap in the mass of stones. The sound of the bird—imitated from one of Aravang's falcons—had been some yards away. Nothing was visible in the murk under the wall.

"*Kul!*" she uttered clearly. The guard moved closer, to listen. The noise on the cliff quieted at once, but Edith thought she heard a pebble slide from its place.

Unfortunately the Alaman had heard or guessed at something moving. He elbowed the girl to one side, thrusting his head out into the opening, with his rifle at the "ready."

"Aravang!" called Edith softly, and as she recollected a native phrase: "*Kabadar!*"

The body of the crouching guard was pressed close to her, and she wrinkled her nose at the scent of filthy sheep-skins. She thought quickly. Surely the form of the Alaman must be visible to some one without, framed as it was against the afterglow in the west.

So Edith tightened her lips, and pushed suddenly with all the strength of her young arms. Taken unawares, the native overbalanced, fell forward through the gap. A grunt resounded. He did not fall far.

With strained ears, Edith heard a rifle rattle over the stones. The next instant the legs and scrambling feet of the guard disappeared as though drawn downward. A cough sounded, then the rustle of a heavy body following the rifle. Then silence.

The slight noises had resounded like miniature explosions to Edith. But the two sentries still kept their posts apparently. The bustle in the court and the stamping of horses drowned the struggle outside the wall.

"My goodness!" Edith realized what had happened. "Oh, the poor man"—she shivered as the powerful figure of Aravang crawled up beside her, climbing over the débris of rocks without. She caught the pungent scent of sweat-soaked wool.

"Missy khanam!" Aravang thrust a cold metal object into her hand, fumbling for it in the dark. His own paw was damp.

Edith pushed the revolver back, wishing ardently that she could speak so that Aravang would understand. On thinking the matter over, she had realized that it would be safe for her servant to enter the *kurgan*. No one there knew Aravang, and as far as appearance went, he was much like the motley men of Monsey's forces.

"Come," she whispered, laying hand on his shoulder. The man was breathing hard, his giant shoulders tensed, like a swimmer after a long battle with the waves. It had been no mean feat to climb the cliff of Yahka Arik.

"Dono-van Khan" he growled beseechingly, and again: "Dono-van Khan."

"Yes, Aravang," she whispered reassuringly, as she would to a child.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### SANCTUARY OF THE TOWER.

BY now the aspect of the courtyard had changed. Alamans, Kurds, and Tartars were lying on their sides behind the ramparts, mostly to the west. Others stood

by the horses, and still others by the unlit flares.

The trap was set.

Edith, as she made her way to the hold, saw Abbas, lantern in hand, talking to one of the groups of men. He looked at her keenly but seeing the figure of a native shadowing her, was content to call out:

"You don't forget me, Abbas Abad. You watch for me, yes, by Allah!"

With a sigh of relief the girl gained the semigloom of the room under the tower. In her absence a lantern had been brought to the Tartar on guard—a broad Mongol wearing a round black hat, a bandolier of cartridges over his shoulder.

Beside him Donovan leaned against the table. Edith advanced toward the ladder slowly, wondering how the armed sentry was to be dealt with. Donovan must be freed. It was for that she had come to the room.

Apparently the prisoner had not noticed her; but his eyes had quickened and he stood with both feet planted firmly on the floor. Here, however, was a situation that Aravang felt himself competent to master without any assistance. He grinned and seated himself on the sizable packing-case on which the Tartar loafed.

The man scanned him with some suspicion and without making room for the burly native. Edith paused, holding her breath. She saw Aravang turn toward the guard as if to say something. The man stared at him from slant, cruel eyes that widened and started from their sockets as a steel-like hand flew up and closed about his throat.

No cry was uttered. Aravang still sat on the box. But in his two hands he held the writhing Tartar helpless.

Releasing one hand, Aravang thrust the other's bulletlike head against the stone wall. There was a dull *crock*, and the figure of the guard slumped upon the box.

"Some one is coming," said Donovan quietly, first in English, then in Turki. Aravang stood up with knotted hands, as if prepared to face and conquer new enemies for the sake of his mistress. Edith, however, had seen Monsey and a party of his men walking toward the tower.

Urgent need spurred the girl's aroused wit. She could explain nothing to Aravang. Instead, she sprang forward, turned over the box and pointed into its empty depths.

Donovan caught her purpose at once, and barked a short command at Aravang. Their powerful friend moved slowly, but with two motions of his great arms he had lifted the unconscious sentry from the floor where the men had slipped into the box. Then he turned the box right side up, over the body.

Yet not before Edith had pulled the bandolier from the Tartar's shoulder, and the round cap from his head. She stripped off Aravang's heavy woolen hat and flung it into a corner, planting the Tartar's cap in its place and the cartridge-belt over his arm. Meanwhile Aravang picked up the rifle, which he handled clumsily—not being accustomed to possession of such modern weapons.

Edith faced about as Monsey strode into the door, flung her a quick glance, and moved toward Donovan.

"I can spare only a moment," the Russian smiled. "But after I have kept an appointment with the Sayaks I intend to return"—he broke off. "Where is the other guard?"

He looked quickly from Donovan to the girl. His men watched from the doorway. Aravang, not understanding, was mute. Before Donovan could speak, Edith answered.

"Ask Abbas," she said. "He wants me to wait for him—after your appointment."

"The devil!"

"I think he is," Edith smiled.

Knowing Abbas, Monsey did not question her. And then there was the dull report of a rifle from the plateau. The Tartars stirred uneasily.

"Announcing our visitors," observed Monsey. He felt Donovan's bonds, muttering that he liked to be sure of his reception when he called again.

"One can never be too sure," nodded Donovan affably.

The Russian ordered the girl curty up the ladder to the tower. "And no tricks, my lady." Edith obeyed with surprising readiness. After glancing around and mak-

ing sure that all was as he wished, Monsey strode toward the door as a scattered burst of firing resounded nearer the *kurgan*.

When he left the room his men followed. Edith, in the upper chamber, waited impatiently until Aravang's shaggy head was thrust up into the opening. Behind him came Donovan, stroking the wrists that the cords had numbed. The three faced each other silently in the gloom. It was Edith who spoke first.

"Come," she said thoughtfully, "to the tower-top."

Donovan had taken the native's weapon and the bandolier. He jerked open the beech, made sure that a cartridge was inserted, and ordered Aravang to surrender his revolver to Edith.

"Why?" he frowned. "I rather like it here—as a base of operations."

"Because I want you to," insisted the girl.

Familiar by now with the damaged stairway, she advanced up to the open air. Donovan followed more slowly.

Night had fallen. But splinters of light were thrusting into the gloom of the *kurgan* as the waiting men began to light the kerosene-soaked flares. First one and then another pine bundle crackled and blazed.

By the growing light they could see dark figures running up the *kurgan*'s entry-way, and the line of Monsey's men standing behind the parapet. These had not yet begun to fire. The reports Edith had heard came from the patrols as they were driven back to the moat.

Near the rocks on the further plateau she thought she saw the light robes of groups of men moving. Overhead the stars had claimed the sky, and the half-moon was shedding a hazy light. Donovan took it all in with a swift glance.

"Monsey is no man's fool," he muttered. "He knows his men are liable to stampede under the old fear of the Sayaks, in the dark. Those flares—"

"Quick!" cried Edith. "We must do something before it is too late."

The man paid her a tribute of admiration in a swift glance. Then his eyes hardened with recollection of the peril below. The whole vista of the courtyard was fast being

revealed by the growing flares. The door leading to the hold and the tower where they stood must be clearly outlined to any one who chanced to look that way. It would be difficult, practically impossible to escape from the door into the courtyard without being seen.

Still that was their only chance of safety, Donovan reasoned. A quick sally, a rush to one of the breaks in the wall on a side away from the Sayak attack—a gauntlet of bullets—

He knelt down, rested his rifle on a fallen timber, waist-high, and searched for Abbas. Edith tugged at his shoulder vigorously.

"What, dear?" he asked, without shifting his position.

"Not that, Donovan Khan," the girl exclaimed. "That is not why I brought you here."

"Right-o!" he murmured cheerily. "But it will help, you know—"

"No—not that." She crouched beside him, her face close to his. "Don't you see? We can do more than that!"

A ragged volley came out of the gloom two hundred yards across the plateau. Under cover of the swirling smoke that rose over the ground they saw groups of Sayaks advancing. Behind the parapet the waiting cohorts held their fire, as Monsey, running back and forth, swore at them angrily. The Englishman knew that when an answering volley came from the *kurgan*—it must do deadly execution among the attackers, who beside the disadvantage of numbers and inferior arms, had the glare of the pine torches in their eyes.

"We must warn the Sayaks, Dono-van Khan."

His eye fixed on Monsey, he did not grasp at first the full significance of her words. She shook him impatiently. "Call to Iskander. Or it will be too late."

The instant Donovan understood her purpose, its whole meaning was revealed to the mind of the soldier. Laying down his weapon, he took the girl's hand in his and studied her anxiously.

"Hurry!" she whispered.

"You do not know, Edith. That might check the Sayak attack, but it would bring all these beggars of Monsey's on us, at the

tower. It would cut us off. Our only chance is a surprise sally."

"I understand."

"During the fighting we might slip away. Edith, I will not throw aside your chance."

Her eyes held his. He could see every shade of expression in her eager face by the glare below. And he saw no fear—only pride and urgent need.

"Donovan Khan, you told me that the Sayaks would continue to storm the *kurgan* until they are utterly cut to pieces." She did not wait for his answer. "We can save the lives of a hundred men. And then Yahka Arik—"

Edith sighed. "I am thinking of the women of Yahka Arik."

He stared at her, reading the decision engraved in her splendid face.

"We can save them, Dono-van Khan, perhaps. Now, hurry." The girl gave him a little push as a second volley—harmless as the first—came from the scattered muskets of the oncoming natives. "Don't you see? It doesn't matter—you and I. We will have each other; they can't change that, now, can they?"

Donovan had seen men before now fling their bodies into the face of death. It was something of a miracle to him, this settled purpose of the girl at his side. He rose, with a laugh that had much gladness in it.

"By Jove! You *are* playing the game, Edith."

Another might have said more. Donovan, once convinced, was a man of action. He cupped his hands to his mouth and faced the gloom of the plateau in which he could now make out the Sayaks, not a hundred yards away.

"Iskander, son of Tahir!" His shout rang out clearly over the bustle below and the confused sounds from the near-by natives. "Go back!"

He had spoken in Turki. Men stared up from the courtyard at the tower in astonishment. Hands were withdrawn from rifles. Monsey seemed turned to a graven image of attention. Donovan continued:

"Iskander, Dono-van Khan is speaking. A trap has been set. Twice your numbers are in the *kurgan*, with magazine rifles."

*Crack—crack!* Monsey's revolver spat at the tower summit, the bullets thudding into the beams overhead. Edith fancied that the Sayaks had halted. Donovan paid no attention to the shots.

"'Ware the ditch!" he shouted in the silence that now held the castle. "It is dug out and staked, in front of you!"

A pause, in which Edith strained her ears. Then came Iskander's answering hail out of the dark:

"Dono-van Khan, I hear."

In response to a command the girl could not distinguish the forms of the Sayaks began to melt back into the rocks and trees. As if to confirm the warning, a heavy volley burst from the wall of the castle—too late, now, to do serious harm. Confused firing was kept up by Monsey's men, who seemed to have been startled by the voice from the tower and were emptying their weapons across the plateau. Faintly Edith heard the Arab's second hail.

"I hear—and will not forget—"

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### THE VOICE OF MAHMOUD.

AS Donovan had anticipated, and as might have been expected, the first rush of Monsey's men toward the hold, and the ladder leading to the tower, was without result, except for certain casualties among the attackers.

Aravang, standing over the aperture in the floor through which the ladder led, was armed only with a short wood pole. But with this weapon—which, indeed, the *kul* favored over others—he sent the first two or three who ventured up the ladder back with broken heads.

Donovan, climbing alertly down the stairs from above, seconded his effort with the clip of cartridges in the Mauser rifle—five shots that drove the attackers back, dragging their wounded, from the ladder and the lower room.

"Ah, that was well, excellency!" grunted the burly native, leaning on his staff. The reflected light from the courtyard served to reveal the two men and the woman to each other dimly.

"It was but the beginning," responded the Englishman in Aravang's tongue. "We must hold the tower now. This is the only entrance."

He paused to count the cartridges in the bandolier. Two or three dozen rounds at the most. The six chambers of the revolver were filled, but extra ammunition was lacking. Aravang, experienced in such warfare, was almost indifferent.

"We may meet another peril, excellency."

"They may try to climb the outside of the tower?"

Aravang shook his head.

"It may be, Dono-van Khan. But this peril is otherwise."

Edith spoke then, and Donovan did not learn what the native had in mind.

"That was splendid," she cried. "Aren't we quite safe in these stone walls—of the tower? If only we can keep them away until my father comes."

"Our position, Edith," he smiled, "is excellent. Aravang alone could hold this floor at a pinch. And, if you will be good enough to mount the stairs for a flight and watch from the embrasures, we can checkmate any attempt to put ladders against the tower itself." He added, however, to himself: "Of course we are without food or water, or necessary ammunition, and Major Fraser-Carnie is at least twelve hours' ride from this place."

"Indeed," Edith reproved him, "I won't think of going up-stairs without you. I think you are trying to send me away!"

She pouted, and Donovan shook his head guiltily. A new outbreak of firing from the plateau, however, took him half-way up the stairs at her side, to one of the arrow slits in the stone wall, giving on the courtyard.

Hence they obtained a fair view of an unexpected development resulting from the withdrawal of the Sayaks. Bundles of small pine branches bound together and soaked in part with kerosene—even that poor brand of liquid brought by camel-back from China to Kashgar—when once ignited are not easily extinguished.

As a consequence the flares of Monsey were still blazing and crackling away above

the courtyard, shedding a bloodlike flood of illumination over the natives who were struggling to haul down the poles supporting the flares and extinguish them. The men worked hastily, with one eye on the tower.

Donovan looked shrewdly for Abbas and Monsey; but the masters of the *kurgan* were keeping well without the range of fire from the summit. Meanwhile the horses had fallen into a semi-panic at the blazing masses near their backs, and were tugging at their halters, while some Tartars struggled to secure them. This light had given opportunity to Iskander to organize a sniping fire from the branches of trees on the farther side of the plateau.

"Oh, do you think it will hurt them—these Alamans and the rest?" inquired Edith interestedly. She felt impelled to call attention to the brief advantage which her strategy had secured for the Sayaks. "Surely these horrid men are worried by us being in the tower and by this shooting."

Donovan, intent on the panorama of the fight, unconsciously dropped his mask of cheerfulness.

"Hardly, I think, Edith. That long range fire has little effect. And when the flares are out the horses will soon quiet down; then we won't be able to see anything that happens."

The girl shrank back at the abrupt moodiness of his words, understanding, however, that it was on her account and not his own that the Englishman was troubled. Shyly she nestled her hand in his, which closed on it firmly.

Realizing that his enemies would soon be in darkness, Donovan jerked up his rifle to pick off some while he could still see to do so. Then he sighed. Cartridges were too few for such a maneuver. He must save his fire for defense of the tower. Edith noticed his act, and promptly questioned him.

"It would be unnecessary bloodshed," he parried, not wishing to reveal the true reason.

Donovan was silent. He drew her close to his side, his arm around the slender shoulder that pressed near him. Edith's

hair was against his cheek, and he felt her warm breath on his throat.

The girl clung to him trustfully, her faith strong that the man she loved would do what was best, under all circumstances. Hers was a love that gives in full, and once in a lifetime.

They watched the flares splutter into smoky gloom as the Tartars pulled down the poles. With this the shooting from the tree-tops dwindled perforce. The horses ceased their plunging, and an unnatural quiet settled upon the castle.

Once Donovan caught up his rifle and took a snap shot at a figure that explored the base of the tower from the summit of the hold. The form sank to the stone flooring, and presently crawled away.

Again there was a brief clamor as the men below tried to take the tower ladder by surprise, and Aravang came into action. Donovan did not even think this important enough to go down the stairs, well knowing the advantages of position possessed by their burly friend. Presently this also ceased.

The smoke currents eddied away from the courtyard. The new moon brightened, casting a luminous half light upon the plateau, the walls of the *kurgan*—a light that blurred all outlines and was more treacherous than helpful.

Edith and Donovan watched it from the shelter of the dismantled beams on the tower top. The girl snuggled close to him.

"I don't like this — this silence," she whispered.

Neither did Donovan. But his voice was cheerful.

"Oh, it's quite to be expected. Monsey is checkmated for a moment. His men probably are disturbed by the failure of their plans, and our appearance in the tower. These natives are superstitious. They must have been startled by my voice."

"Please, you are just trying to say nice things. That is what I tried to tell you a little while ago."

Donovan, however, had been reasoning aloud. His mind was alert. He was disappointed by the complete withdrawal of the Sayaks—that the quiet of the plateau

seemed to hint. What was Monsey doing? The Russian would not leave them unmolested in the tower, he knew.

If scaling ladders were being prepared, he would have heard some noise. And if his enemies did not plan to rush the tower summit from without, what were their intentions? To wait for daylight?

Dawn would give an advantage to Monsey, for the defenders of the tower would then be visible. On the other hand, delay would bring Major Fraser-Carnie and Arthur Rand nearer to Yahka Arik. No, Monsey would hardly wait.

Edith did not try to think. She was resting wearily against Donovan, thankful for the interval of peace with him at her side. The peril of the *kurgan* seemed to draw farther off. Vaguely, she felt that all would be well, somehow.

"Dearest, this is our hour of peace," she heard him say. "We've cut ourselves off in the tower. We'll be together, now, won't we, sweetheart? You are not afraid?"

She drew slightly away from him, trying to see into his eyes that were near hers. "No," she whispered. Then: "You haven't said yet that—that you love me."

His arm tightened around her as he laughed. "Love you, Edith? I have done nothing else since you came to Yahka Arik. Didn't you know that?"

The girl hid her face against his cheek and her hand clasped his that held her fast. "Yes, Dono-van Khan, I knew. But then I wanted to hear you really say it to me. Now, everything's all right—"

She did not complete the words, for Donovan closed her lips with a kiss that seemed to draw the breath from her body. So close was Edith pressed to him she could feel the beating of his heart in time with her own, and hear him murmur from time to time inarticulate things in her ear, so that she laughed happily.

So did these two, waiting in the tower for what would come to pass, voice their love that was to Edith the most splendid gift of this other world.

Donovan moved cautiously to the edge of the parapet at a sound from below.

Edith heard Monsey speak, from the shadows that clung to the stone shelters of the courtyard.

"A truce, Donovan," he called. "Will you hold your fire while we talk terms?"

The man in the tower considered.

"If your men stay where they are—yes," he announced, keeping well behind the stone breastwork. "No trickery, mind you!"

"Granted." The girl heard Monsey laugh. He spoke like one who held the situation well in hand. "May I compliment you on the trick you played us—warning off your Sayak friends? It was too bad, though, to give your secret away. You will do well to accept my terms."

"I was going to propose some of my own."

"No use, Mr. Dono-van Khan."

"I'm afraid not. The Sayaks have marked you for their own," Donovan shifted guilefully into Turki for the benefit of such of Monsey's men as might be within hearing.

Edith caught an oath from the courtyard below. Then the Russian responded something she could not understand. She leaned back against the timbers, waiting. Into her eyes crept the glimmer of countless stars. The heavens were afire, and in the clear mountain air the jeweled radiance of the sky seemed very close to the wearied girl.

The murmur of the men's voices went on, and her eyes closed through sheer drowsiness. She had not slept for nearly forty-eight hours. It was Donovan's return that roused her from her stupor.

He spoke grimly.

"I must tell you this, Edith. Monsey's men are piling timbers and firewood under the entrance hole of the tower—throwing the stuff in from the door. He says that he will burn us out if we don't surrender."

"Oh." Edith sat up with sudden dread. He wouldn't do that!"

Donovan did not answer at once. "He would, dear, to save his own skin. I wonder if it's come to that? Somehow, I don't think so. Of course, if I were alone here he'd jolly well start a bonfire at once."

"Then we won't surrender not a bit.

And I'll stay right here, so there will be no bonfire, as you say," she responded promptly. She knew Monsey better than to ask—although she wanted to—whether Donovan could be released, unhurt, if she gave herself up. She dreaded parting with Donovan, even for a moment.

"You must think of yourself a little," he protested.

"I am. And I don't want you to talk to him any more."

This ended the conference. Donovan reflected that the danger of fire was the one that must have occurred to Aravang. It was a danger, because he and Aravang could not prevent the piling up of wood. A large blaze, started under the entrance to the tower, would soon catch in the ruins of the staircase, and the tower itself would serve as a chimney for the draft. Nevertheless, he fancied that this was Monsey's last card.

With Donovan's arm around her once more, the girl subsided into the drowsiness she was powerless to fight. She tried vainly to keep her eyes open.

In this state of half wakefulness, the whole aspect of her plight lost its reality. What was the tower, the *kurgan*, Monsey, but a bad dream, like the one in Srinagar? Only Donovan was real. She rested her cheek against his arm.

Dull sounds from the regions below failed to disturb her as they did the man. He did not relish hearing an incendiary pyre prepared. But he was powerless to do anything save watch from the tower top.

His arm tightened about the woman. She was his. Nothing must take her away from him now.

Presently he shook her gently into consciousness.

"Listen," he said quietly.

A sound from the plateau had reached his keen ears. He could not identify it. Edith hearkened.

"Why, it's camels," she said at once. "I ought to know their coughing by now. But what in the world are camels doing around here?"

"I fancy you're right." He rose and stepped to the parapet. Something was

moving in front of the *kurgan*. He strained his eyes through the haze of moonlight. Some shapes, clumsy and grotesque, were taking semblance of form.

The girl was not sure she was not still dreaming — except for Donovan's aroused interest. Camels! Why, that was absurd. Unless a wandering herd had strayed there.

"They are coming here," whispered Donovan.

She could hear the tinkle of rusty bells now, and the protesting cough of the beasts — even the muffled calls of the drivers, still veiled in the haze. Shadows were passing over the ground.

The thought came to her that here was aid; but at once she reflected that her father's party were mounted on horses. The only camels in these mountain passes were those of Yahka Arik.

"It's a caravan," muttered Donovan. "Now what does that mean?"

Already Edith was conscious that movement was afoot in the *kurgan* below them. Men were running to the wall. The *clink* of metal echoed faintly.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### SAYAK FURY.

**E**DITH was fully awake, but exhausted by her long vigil and the events of the last hours. It was hard for her to grasp all that came upon the heels of the caravan.

It was not long before she was conscious of a high voice from the plain not far from the *kurgan*. It came out of the moonlight, wailing and shadowy as the light itself in its substance.

She could not distinguish the words. Donovan, every faculty bent into listening, breathed softly. An attentive quiet had settled upon the castle. Edith caught the drift of strange syllables, intoned after the fashion of a chant. The voice came nearer and grew more distinct.

"By Jove!"

She took Donovan's arm. "What is it?"

"Mahoud. It is some kind of a message. Something about the caravan being prepared. Listen:

"*The stars are setting,*" he repeated, "*and the caravan—starts for the dawn of nothing. O make haste.*"

"It's queer." Edith shivered, not perceiving that the night cold had gripped her in her sleep. "Why, he is walking in front of the camels, and coming here."

Donovan was intent on what was passing. The chant went on.

"*For the men of faith, a fitting grave,*" he murmured. "*But for some there is no grave. Their seats are empty in which they shall ride. The master of the caravan calls, and they will come—when what is written will come to pass.*"

Edith could see Mahmoud now. Wrapped in his long cloak, the *hakim* moved through the moonlight like some disembodied spirit. His lean arms were raised. His voice shrilled into the air.

Owing to the waning moon, and the shadows cast by the moving forms of the camels, the appearance of Mahmoud was illusory as he shifted from shadow to shadow, from place to place. Long watching had strained Edith's sight so that she experienced the phenomenon known to those who have centered their faculties of attention throughout a night vigil—a blurring of outlines and a disturbance of vision that cloaked the vista of the plain with the aspect of a mirage.

Edith was not the only one in the *kurgan* to be bewildered.

Flashes from the rampart lanced into the murk; shattering reports assailed her ears. The firing grew heavier—became thunderous. A camel squealed: the voice of Mahmoud, heard in the brief intervals between shots, went on, although the cloaked figure seemed to have sunk to the ground.

Donovan laughed through set teeth.

"So Monsey's men have nerves," he cried, "even as you and I. That shooting is out of hand."

He watched the scene under them keenly, hands cupped beside his eyes. Swirling smoke eddied across his vision, veiling the courtyard, except for the rifle flashes. All the firing seemed to be directed at Mahmoud.

"Not much good, bombarding the landscape at night," he shouted to Edith cheer-

fully. "It excites the men and makes a lot of smoke. I've seen it before this."

She pressed trembling hands to her ears, wondering whether his words were not intended merely to hearten her.

"What is — happening?" she cried. "And Mahmoud?"

"Some mummary of the *hakim*—always means something. Wait."

His disjointed sentences barely reached her. Then he gripped her arm and bent forward.

New sounds were adrift in the courtyard. Horses neighed — hoofs beat upon stone. Men shouted and cursed. To Edith, struggling with wavering senses, the *kurgan* and the plain alike were an ocean in which shapes darted, and a flood of plunging forms swept under the tower. She heard Donovan cry:

"The horses are loosed."

In the smoky murk she could see nothing clearly. A horrid sound rose from the farther end of the *kurgan* — a man's scream. It seemed to her that new forms, white and gray, pressed past the base of the tower, on the broken roof of the hold, and swept over the distant wall to the north.

Surely she caught the gleam of bare steel against the flash of a rifle. The shooting dwindled, but voices growled and roared.

"Sayak!" And again: "Sayak!"

Then came the words clearly to the girl: "Tahir of *kadr*." And again: "Donovan Khan — ho! Dono-van Khan!"

Donovan's lips almost touched her ear. "By Jove! That was clever, what? The Sayaks have crept through the breaches to the north and south and cut loose the horses.

With the word he left her. The girl saw him dive down the stairs. A fresh uproar had arisen in the interior of the tower. There was a crashing of wood and the impact of running feet, followed by the swift, regular crack of a rifle.

Stunned, she sought for Donovan. Peering over the parapet, she saw a lantern flicker into light in the mid-courtyard. Monsey and some of his Tartars were visible beside it, the Russian hatless, his face wet with perspiration, a smoking revolver in his hand.

On a pile of stones, Edith made out a Sayak boy, sighting a musket that was longer than his own body; behind the boy cloaked forms waved bare knives. Surely these were women. Edith even fancied that she saw the majestic form of the *hadj* of Yahka Arik moving on the rampart.

Monsey was shouting to his men. She caught the flash of his revolver, before a mass of rushing Sayaks swept toward him and the light went out suddenly, leaving the *kurgan* in its murk. Cries of pain and anger resounded. Edith recollects that Donovan must have disappeared down the stairs, and turned after him, her one thought to find him and keep close to his side.

At the last landing where Aravang had been left a struggle was progressing in the dark, revealed vaguely by a lantern placed on the heap of logs, broken beams, and firewood that had risen close to the opening in the floor.

Bodies threshed about the stones, dark faces alight with panic peered up into the opening from below, while men fought to push themselves up through the aperture.

On the lowest step of the stairs, just in front of her, the girl recognized Donovan instinctively. He was swinging a clubbed rifle at the tide of enemies. Several bodies at his feet half choked the opening.

Then Edith realized that the men of the *kurgan* had not waited to light the pile under the tower, but were using it to storm their sanctuary. Two forms, locked in conflict, rolled downward through the opening.

A body was pulled from the aperture which glowed redly like the entrance to some purgatory. She saw the evil face of Abbas peering up, as Donovan was pressed back and grappled by a squat Tatar.

It seemed to the girl that the Alaman had come to seek her, despite the fury that was raging without. His purpose was reinforced by the terror of his men, to whom the tower loomed as a refuge from the deadlier hatred without.

Her heart turned to water at the glimpse of Donovan struggling silently with the native on the steps below her. Abbas also had seen the Englishman, and his arm drew

back, a knife in its palm. Fire surged through the girl's body and gripped her brain.

She clasped the revolver she held in both hands, pointed it at the Alaman's broad face, and pulled the trigger. The report bellowed in the confined space.

Seldom have women, even the bravest been able to resist closing their eyes when they discharged a weapon. With lids tight shut, Edith continued to press the trigger savagely. She was fighting for the man she loved. To save Donovan she would have gripped Abbas with bare hands. So, since the first ages of man have women fought when peril faced their husbands and children. And so were native women fighting that night in the *kurgan*.

Edith, her eyes still tight closed, continued to pull the trigger of her revolver, even after it clicked fruitlessly and all the cartridges had sped from its chambers—even the one that the girl, mindful of the Mohammedan legend, had thought was marked for her. The tower had grown quieter. Presently she was conscious of a cheery voice:

"Cease firing, Edith."

She opened her eyes. The bodies still stirred on the stone floor of the tower room, the lantern flickered on the logs below. Sounds of conflict swept in from without. But the stair and the pile of wood were empty of foes, and Donovan was not to be seen.

"Where are you?" she exclaimed anxiously.

"Present." Donovan emerged from under the stairs directly beneath her feet and stepped swiftly to her side. He was laughing. "I took to the first dugout handy when you began to strafe the place. Brave girl!"

His eyes were tender as he bent over her. She shivered, staring down at the lantern, unable to realize the truth that he was still well and whole at her side. Then she clung to him, burying her head in his shoulder.

"Did—did I kill Abbas?" He caught a choked voice from somewhere under his chin.

"Abbas? No, you missed him, with something to spare. Aravang was alive

and kicking in the mêlée below. He pulled the Alaman down, I think. By rights that native of yours ought to be dead a dozen times before now. But he isn't—thanks to some Providence that looks after his kind. Edith, do you realize you saved my life?" He was talking quickly, anxiously, his eyes fixed on the vista of the room below, with its array of broken men that he shielded carefully from her sight.

"I? How?"

"Well," he laughed again, not altogether steadily, "your first shot knocked the brains out of that Tartar on top of me. The others ran from your barrage after Aravang tackled their chief. So did I—run. You creased the back of my jaw just a little with a bullet, besides singeing my neck. I fancy your last shot got Aravang in the leg. I heard him swear."

"Oh, dear. I meant to shoot Abbas."

She looked up, her lips trembling with a smile. For the first time she saw Donovan's tired face, spotted with blood—from his slain antagonist—and with a dark line running down from his own injured chin.

"Oh!"

Edith fainted in his arms.

Aravang's mighty strength had held the stairs at the head of the pile of wood until Donovan's rifle came to his aid; but by then the *kul* was grappling with an agile Kurd who slashed at him with a knife and tore at his face with fanglike teeth. The two had rolled to the floor under Donovan's feet and out into the opening through which the men of Abbas were pressing warily against the swinging rifle butt over their heads.

Fortunately for Aravang, his foes were half mad with panic born of the peril that had ascended the walls of the stronghold. For not alone had the fighting men of Yaka-Arik come to the assault under cover of Mahmoud's diversion in front of the tower. Women, boys, and old men, the Sayaks had come, summoned by Iskander during the hours of quiet after Donovan's warning, armed with whatever they could lay hand on, and ready to die in the defense of their homes and the temple. And at their head the *hadji* had ridden.

So the men about Abbas felt in their hearts a greater fear than that of the mystery of Yahka Arik—the fear of righteousness angered women and aged men, led by a priest, of fathers and husbands who cared not for their own lives so long as the marauders were slain—and the struggling Aravang was unheeded until he rose, swaying above the body of his victim, the Kurd.

Just at that moment Abbas, standing above him on the wood, reached for his knife. And Aravang, seeing this, reached for Abbas with teeth agrin. A pawlike hand jerked the Alaman down, to behind the pile, and the bloody face of the *kui* glared at his.

"Aid!" Abbas Abad screamed: "Aid—O my worthy friends—leave me not."

But down through the aperture came the ragged fusillade from the revolver of Edith Rand, and the followers of Abbas fled away from this new peril, crying that the place was bewitched, and that there were spirits in the tower. Abbas groped on the stone floor for the knife which had fallen from his hand in his fall, and saw that Aravang had set his foot on it. And he read his death in the savage eyes that flamed into his.

"Thou art the man," roared Aravang, "who would have burned my mistress. Taste then what ye have stored up!"

Aravang had taken a small log in his free hand, and upon this the eye of the merchant fastened while prayers and offers of money flooded from his quivering lips. In the midst of his begging he flung his stout body forward, seeking to upset the *kul*, his hand clutching for the precious knife. Aravang stepped back swiftly, and Abbas reached the knife—only to sink down upon it, his skull shattered by a blow from the log driven down with all the *kul's* weight behind it.

Then Aravang took up the body of his enemy in his arms and strode over the massed wood, limping under the hurt of Edith's wandering bullet, but inexorable in his purpose.

He staggered forward among frantic horses toward a group of Tartars who had flocked together in the center of the courtyard, while the struggle ebbed about them

in the moonlight. He stepped over bodies that writhed on the stones, and pushed aside, unheeding, a Sayak girl who was moaning out her life, a bayonet in her breast.

"Sayak!" he heard the battle cry of the tribe: "Sayak!"

The darkness under the parapets was rife with sound and movement as scattered Tartars and Alamans sought vainly for leaders, and gave back under blows from swords that they could not see.

"They are devils!" cried one. "Flee—flee!"

Aravang headed toward where he could see two robed Sayaks standing and a third kneeling. Beside them a figure lay prone on the floor. As he approached the *kul* heard the kneeling Sayak speaking very quietly.

"*Tamam shud* (it is finished)," Iskander was saying, swaying upon his knees. "Ohé, my enemy is slain by my hand—as I have sworn—it has come to pass."

Then Aravang saw that the body on the stones was that of Monsey. Beside it he tossed the bulky form that was Abbas, and turned to Mahmoud, who, with the *hadj* stood beside the Arab chieftain.

"The son of Tahir is dying," said Mahmoud to Aravang.

While the fury without ebbed through the *kurgan*, Donovan sat passively on the lowest step, holding the precious burden of the woman close to his chest. Having assured himself that she was uninjured, he waited, stroking the coils of heavy hair that had fallen loose upon her shoulders.

And while he waited, fate tossed the dice of destiny; the battling elements of this world of the hills tore at each other, and parted. The moving finger of unalterable Providence wrote—a fragment—and passed on, unseen.

The smoke lifted and drifted away from the walls of the castle. In the heavens, the moon declined behind the cloud bank to the west, and the stars alone looked down upon the mountaintop.

To the exhausted watcher on the stairs it seemed as if his life and the life of the woman in his arms was carried onward by

a current he could no longer resist. But he held her firmly, joyful in the knowledge that they could not now be parted.

Footsteps approached the tower entrance slowly. Looking down, Donovan saw Mahmoud peering up at him apathetically, a lantern held in a clawlike hand. Behind him Aravang limped, soaked in his own blood, blackened and bruised, wounded in body and every limb, but keeping himself stoically upright.

"*Salaam, Mahmoud,*" said the Englishman. "Is the fighting finished?"

"It is finished."

"And the son of Tahir?"

"He is no more. He sought the man Monsey, and found him." The *hakim* beckoned. "Come, Dono-van Khan. You must leave the castle. Your work here is done."

With that he turned away. The Englishman rose stiffly and carried his burden into the courtyard; where masses of Sayaks—men, women, and boys—were gathered about the dark groups of prisoners. He stepped over prone bodies and went down the steps to the plain where the horses were being collected and a string of camels waited. Aravang followed.

They went onward until they came to the edge of the woods, where the native led Donovan to an open ravine where was the bed of a stream and pools of fresh water. Here they bathed Edith's face, somewhat helplessly—being unskilled in caring for the needs of a woman—and sat down to wait until she should return to her senses.

Presently a glimmer of fiery light crept through the screen of trees between them and the plateau, and the crackle of flames came to their ears.

Donovan questioned the native with a glance.

"Mahmoud, the all-wise, has set fire to the *kurgan*, excellency. Thus will the bodies, all except two, be burned, and the nest of the vultures will be no more."

The white man nodded.

"So Iskander led the Sayaks into the north and south of the *kurgan*, Aravang," he mused, "while Mahmoud drew their attention and fire to the west? It was well done. Yet whence came these numbers?"

He spoke idly, his gaze on the unconscious girl, as if merely confirming his belief as to what had passed. Aravang was resting his head on his bent arms—both men numbed by pain, and the relief from long suspense.

"Excellency, during the pause between the first attack and the end, the whole village of Yahka Arik came to the *kurgan*. You saw what followed, when rifles were useless before daggers near at hand in the dark. But it was the fear of Mahmoud that brought it to pass."

"Fear?" Donovan dipped his hand into the water and laid it on Edith's curls gently. "I wonder. Then, after all, as Major Fraser-Carnie might say, it was merely a question of morale. But why did the camels come?"

Aravang did not reply at once.

"Soon you will see," he muttered.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE PASSING OF THE CARAVAN.

IT was high midday when a tired American gentleman clad in a long black coat, riding breeches, and a flapping sombrero, pushed his horse up the valleys toward the height where a mounted guide conducted him, followed by a string of impatient Garhwalis of whom only those with the best horses were able to keep near them.

Beside him Major Fraser-Carnie was unnaturally cheerful, keeping at the same time an eye upon a faint column of smoke that rose through the trees in front of them, and inwardly cursing the reticence of the native guide who had joined them that morning and whose vocabulary, whether by linguistic limitations or personal inclination, was confined to the four words:

"*Dono-van Khan*" and "*Missy Khanum*."

Even the optimism and doggedness of the worthy major that had enabled them to journey from Kashmir to Kashgar and the hills suffered when the guide disappeared as if by magic, swallowed up in the underbrush. He glanced back at the half-dozen mounted riflemen in their green

tunics who were lashing wearied beasts in the dread of being left behind the *sahibs* should be fighting—for which they had come expectantly half a thousand miles—be near at hand.

"Damn your ambuscades!" swore Arthur Rand. "My girl is up there where we saw the fire last night."

He rode very well, this lean American father with the white hair and the slow drawl that coated a bitter voice. He spurred on into a green ravine, and the English major, armed only with a valued riding crop, followed, in absolute defiance of all rules of tactics for a small, mounted patrol in hostile country.

"Damned if I'll let you lead," he responded irritably.

So the two came bridle to bridle to the bed of a small brook, and simultaneously reined in their mounts at sight of Donovan and Edith cooking lunch very carefully and with much skill over a tiny camp-fire, while Aravang stretched his sheep-skin clad body beside them. One by one the best mounted troopers—all volunteers picked from a native regiment—trotted up with carbines in hand and eyes alert for the treachery which long experience taught them was apt to follow close upon the heels of foolhardy *sahibs* who rode with no regard for the danger of mountain muskets.

These veteran border warriors—and, to tell the truth, their leader also—were astonished to see a tall *mem-sahib* with hair much like spun gold and eyes that gleamed like jewels from a smoke-stained face rise and fly toward the horse of the American who had led them from Kashgar.

"Daddy!"

"My girl!"

Arthur Rand swung from his saddle with an ease beyond his years, and took Edith into his arms. Major Fraser-Carnie said: "My word!" and coughed. Then he brought his horse up to interview the pale Englishman who waited beside the fire.

"So you had a hand in this, my young rascal!" he accused.

Donovan smiled, without taking his eyes from Edith and her father.

"Not as much as you might think, master," he said. "Remember, you said at

Gilgit I was heading into trouble in the hills. Well, what are you doing here yourself with an armed force on native soil?"

Fraser-Carnie looked guilty, and muttered something about old ties, and all that sort of thing. "Besides, you see, Captain Donovan, I couldn't let that blooming American—confoundedly game, you know—come up here on his own, of course."

"I see." Donovan's eyes twinkled, although he spoke gravely. His thoughts went back to the evening when the two had talked at the major's bungalow, and the officer's reverence for the memory of the wife of Arthur Rand, and he wondered whether Fraser-Carnie had done justice to his own motives.

Nothing would content the major, however, but a screening force flung in the direction of the smouldering tower. Even when his men reported nothing at the *kurgan* except the embers of the fire and some camels feeding near by. And no sight of any native village or villagers or, indeed, any evidence of a fight except for scattered cartridge shells.

"Captain Donovan can tell us the story," he objected.

Donovan's eyes met Edith's, serious over the camp-fire.

"Perhaps," he said, "it might better keep."

Meanwhile Edith was bemoaning the absence of food adequate for three hungry men, and, oh, such a starved girl. Fraser-Carnie, engrossed by this need of all Englishmen—a hearty lunch—ordered up his emergency rations and detailed a man from the troopers' mess to cook. White napkins were spread on the grass, and Edith seated herself, flushed with triumph and the after-effect of great fatigue, on the grass between her father and John Donovan.

While she gripped Arthur Rand's hand, her other hand was busied with a spoon of beans.

"Oh, Dono-van Khan!" she cried joyfully. "Daddy says we are quite bankrupt. He has failed most terribly, and we haven't a penny."

Donovan smiled. Six months ago these tidings would have seemed to Edith to be the collapse of the world about her ears

and the loss of her birthright. Now, it was a vague detail, between important spoonfuls of delicious beans.

A year ago Arthur Rand would have broken his own heart rather than confess as much to his daughter. Here, with Edith restored and quite evidently in possession of a tall, unshaven English officer, it was a matter of quite minor importance. Only Major Fraser-Carnie felt called upon to make a polite remark.

He said something about it being quite the thing, after the war—that none of his friends cared much for pennies now.

"My sister does," said Arthur Rand, his eyes on his daughter. "She is already organizing a touring bureau for Americans in India, with the added attraction of a medical supply furnished free of charge."

Edith glanced at Donovan.

"Do you think I would make a nice spellbinder?" she asked, and flushed as the major saw his chance and said something about spells.

"We must get away from this place," put in Arthur Rand. "It is right inhospitable looking, and besides we must reach your aunt before she organizes her company."

But the major was not to be shifted from the topic that had occurred to him.

"I fancy Captain Donovan will have something to say about the future of his wife," he pointed out, dodging a covert kick launched by the individual in question. "Oh, now, my dear young man. You will wish, of course, to take your wife to your estates in Kent—"

"Estates?" Edith paused uncomfortably, a piece of biscuit held before her mouth. "Oh, dear! I thought you were broke, like me."

"Most probably I am," Donovan assured her. "I have been, generally."

"Then that's settled." Edith returned to her biscuit with relish.

Upon the gathering of these four wanderers, come to the world of the hills each for sufficient reason and just then happy beyond all telling and no longer hungry, advanced a smart Garhwali carrying a rifle. He stood at attention by Major Fraser-Carnie.

"*Sahib*, the camels come hither, with riders."

They rose, and the major spoke a brief word to his men seated at their meal some distance away. The troopers took up their weapons instantly and mounted.

In the silence that settled on the ravine, Edith heard the *clink-clank* of camel bells and the familiar pad of soft feet. Through the trees she saw the moving shapes of clumsy beasts.

The camel bells came nearer. Major Fraser-Carnie stepped in front of the girl, but Donovan remained at her side, a curious expression in his eyes. They saw a cloaked figure, head bent on chest, coming down the ravine from the *kurgan*.

"Iskander?" she whispered to Donovan.

He shook his head, saying quietly that Iskander had died at the tower. She made a little, sorrowing sound. The Arab had, in many ways, been her friend, although of another race and faith.

"Why," she cried softly, "it is Mahmoud, leading the first camel."

Into their view came a long line of camels, tied nose to tail, walking patiently in the wake of their leader. The old physician advanced along the side of the brook following a slight trail, and seemed not to notice them.

On the first camel of the caravan a man was seated. He was erect, in the heavily wadded seat between the humps of the beast, his hands braced before him, his features stolid. On the second camel another figure rested.

"Monsey!" exclaimed Edith to Donovan. "And Abbas."

He drew her back a little, away from the stream, his face grave. The girl followed willingly, but turned to him a questioning glance.

"What does it mean?"

"A custom of the Sayaks with their enemies. Mahmoud makes them sit there, somehow. He will leave the caravan presently and let it take its course through the villages of the hills."

They watched as the Garhwalis drew back, allowing the camels to pass through them. The rusty bells clanked, the beasts —indifferent as ever—passed patiently

along. Monsey and Abbas swayed slightly in their seats with the movement of their mounts. Edith wondered why her father and the major, standing close to the caravan, did and said nothing.

By now the last camel had passed, wending its way among the trees.

Fraser-Carnie wheeled and called to Donovan, his ruddy face serious.

"Where is that caravan bound?"

"Kashgar—anywhere, most likely." Donovan still held Edith's hand firmly. "The natives say 'nowhere.'"

The major seemed inclined to ask further questions, but checked himself with a glance at Edith.

"Strange, Rand, what?" he muttered, shaking his head. "I'm glad your daughter was not as near as we were. These legends of the hills sometimes take the form of a rather ghastly reality. And I've heard of a caravan—" he broke off to glance at his friend. "I think you and I have had the privilege of an unusual insight into native customs. Did you see what I saw?"

"They seemed to be in a kind of rigid state," responded the American uncomfortably, "some form of epileptic trance, perhaps."

Again Fraser-Carnie shook his head.

"I know a dead man when I see one," he said quietly, "or two, for that matter."

A little way behind them Edith pressed Donovan's hand to her cheek. She realized that the passing of Monsey and Abbas had held something of the unwanted in it, but she knew that Donovan did not want to explain further.

The silence of the ravine, and the staring native troopers who were looking, with her father and the major, after the caravan, brought a chill upon her new joy, and she turned to Donovan with a gesture that asked for comfort. A sleepy weariness was in her eyes that held, however, another light.

"You will take me away with my father, Dono-van Khan," she asked—"away from here? And never, never leave me?"

He looked down into her eyes.

"If you will be happy, dear. Promise me that you will be happy?"

She glanced quickly around, noting, as a woman will, whether or not they were observed. Then she put her arms around his shoulders and lifted her face shyly.

"I won't promise anything more, Dono-van Khan."

(The End.)

## THE MOUNTAINEER

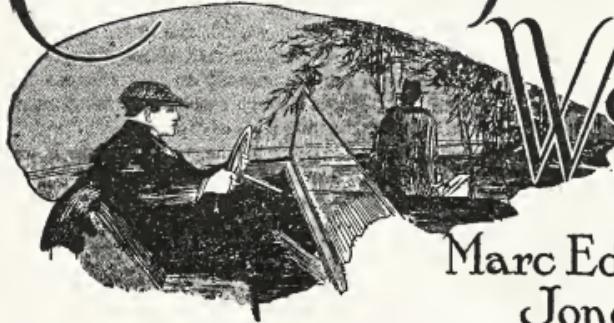
WHERE a needling granite peak  
Pierces billows of the sky,  
Where the tongues of torrents speak  
And the four winds loose their cry,  
Here I fare where claw and beak  
Spell the hazards I defy.

O'er my head is golden light;  
'Neath my feet are beating rains;  
In the pulsing starry night,  
Worlds below me, stretch the plains,  
Cities, brawling in their blight,  
With their Abels and their Cains.

Freed I fare, but not alone;  
For in laughter of glad streams,  
In the thunders' growling moan,  
Or in sunlight's searching beams  
Showers sweet essence of the known  
'Mid the peaks where truth weds dreams!

*Paul Steele.*

# Clothes for a Week by Marc Edmund Jones



WHEN he stubbed his toe, hurrying aboard the ferry, Jack Wells knew the extent of the deterioration of his wardrobe. For a moment his foot was caught; then there was the sickening sound and feel of a rip, and perhaps two inches of sole pulled away from the vamp of his shoe.

In his pocket rested a dollar and a half in loose change, the sum of his resources. Not an item of clothing but was long beyond repair, his footwear especially. That he gave an impression of neatness was a miracle of care; that hitherto he had escaped serious inconvenience and damage could be due to nothing short of dogged will-power, the sheer strength of purpose which had brought him back to New York City.

He was a failure, and he did not propose to remain one. In New York he once had been successful and he was returning to the inhospitable confines of that city, but with only the vaguest idea of what his next move would be.

In the cabin of the ferry he looked at his damaged shoe. Its further use was out of the question, its repair impossible.

"Damn!" he muttered. Then he smiled. "At least I'm at the bottom of things now—" addressing trousers patched at both knees "—things will have to turn! Something will have to break!"

Measurably cheered by the thought, he pressed forward and out on to the front end of the boat. The whistle already had

blown. The vessel was half out of its slip, leaving the Jersey shore behind. A moment later it turned down the North River—as the Hudson is known abreast of New York—suiting its course to the sweep of the incoming tide before swinging into the Manhattan side.

The effect of the city upon a stranger or returning traveler is striking, especially when approached by water. With the small group of sky-scrappers at Forty-Second, the isolated Metropolitan Tower at Twenty-Third, and the amazing clutter of cloud-ticklers from the Woolworth to the Whitehall Building at the southern tip of the island, it has a sky line of accomplishment. Beneath the loftier structures is the no less pretentious detail of the city's profile. South are the docks and shipping of a world metropolis. North are the apartments, ten, twelve, thirteen stories, stretching in an unbroken row as far as Dyckman ferry. No one, in power of imagination above a clod, can look upon New York and despair of his own achievement.

The man who had failed straightened his shoulders subconsciously. Then he turned his attention to things closer about him.

It was still light, and the crowd gathered at the forward end of the ferry was made up mostly of early theater goers from the Jersey suburbs. In the center runways were the automobiles and trucks to be found crossing the river at any hour of the day

and night. As the one of these nearest the gate, a low, rangy touring car, caught his eye, there suddenly swept over him the keenest sense of regret he had known since the turn of his fortunes and his own day of prosperity.

It was the make of car he had owned, the fastest model on the market, built on special order; and the trips he had taken behind its wheel had represented the only moments in his life in which he had not held himself entirely to the cold, hard routine of work.

And now! A whimsical expression came into his face as he studied the machine; noted the precision and luxury of its workmanship. It fascinated him. It seemed to call to him, to challenge him to win success again if for no other reason than to own a car like it. His gaze, traveling upward met the look of the rather stout man in the driver's seat, and all at once he flushed. Bitterly conscious of his own shabbiness, he read in the expression of the other amusement and curiosity. His envy probably was very apparent.

Turning away, his mind flashed to the problem before him. Within two or three minutes he would be ashore in New York again, after four years. His funds were too low for a leisurely consideration of possible opportunities, yet not the faintest shred of inspiration would come to him.

In his childhood he had read Alger's books for boys. He smiled as he thought of the ease with which those heroes had gained their chance. A fortunate meeting in which some rich man would be in a predicament would give the boy an opportunity to be of service; there would be reward—

It could never happen in real life. Besides, he had had success, and it might be doubly hard for him to climb again. But he would do it!

The rattle of pawl and ratchet in the ferry house warned him that the boat was nosing into place. There was a clatter as the automobiles started their engines. He turned for a last look at the machine which might have been his own, were it an older model.

The gates were pulled back, and the people behind him surged over the gangplank. The attendant signaled to the first

automobile, but it did not move. For a moment there was a patient silence, and then the din of a dozen horns voiced the protest of the other vehicles held on both of the runways. Jack suddenly realized that the car was stalled, and in the same instant he saw that the man at the wheel was rattled and apparently an inexperienced driver.

Several ferry employees rushed up, and there were cries of "push it off," and "roll her up out of the way." Jack, however, acted quickly.

"I know this machine!" he exclaimed, stepping to its side and raising the hood.

A glance showed him but few changes of design in four years. He looked first at the carburetor. It was dry. He pounded the vacuum tank on a chance and the gasoline flooded the carburetor immediately. It had been some obstruction, a bit of dirt—and the whole was the work of a minute.

The driver, however, although he started his engine, still was nervous and confused.

"Shall I drive you out?" Jack volunteered.

"Oh! Would you?" with palpable relief.

Grinning, Jack swung over the door behind the wheel, and the car spurted up the incline with wonderful response as his foot found the throttle, and as the gears noiselessly meshed and changed their places at his bidding. The flapping sole of his shoe was forgotten. It seemed hard to realize that he was not Jackson Wells again, metallurgical and structural engineer, possessing a country-wide reputation in spite of his youth.

"If you are in no great hurry to get anywhere—" the voice of the man beside him was distinctly apologetic.

Jack had maneuvered the machine through the maze of people and vehicles outside the ferry-house, across the tracks of the street car terminals, and was headed eastward on Forty-Second. From force of habit he had taken this route, but he realized suddenly he was in the rôle of volunteer chauffeur. Slowing, he faced his companion.

"I'm a returned wanderer," he explained, "and if you care to have me I'll be glad to drive you wherever you say! I have noth-

ing to do, except kill time, until business hours to-morrow."

The other hesitated. He was all of twenty years older than Jack, decidedly portly and florid. Undoubtedly he was owner of the car.

"If you could drive me to West End and Eighty-Third—"

Jack swung up Tenth Avenue, and in the Sixties cut back west to Eleventh. In New York, where streets change their names and start all over again, Eleventh becomes West End as a mark of an abrupt metamorphosis in character. Eleventh contains the New York Central freight tracks, is lined with warehouses, gas tanks, and similar necessary but undignified civic edifices. It is known, familiarly, as "Death Avenue." West End, however, is the most exclusive street of the residential West Side, with the possible exception of its neighbor, the Drive. At the apartment indicated by his passenger Jack stopped and waited for his dismissal.

"You—you are sure you have nothing to do right away—?" There was a note of gratitude in the autoist's voice. He descended to the walk and turned to face the younger man.

"Not a thing!" Jack smiled.

"Then—if you could wait just a few minutes—" Sentences beginning with "if" and falling away to an unspoken finish seemed to be his outstanding characteristic. He hurried into the apartment.

Jack surveyed the street. He was not familiar with this particular neighborhood, but it seemed to him that many of the buildings were new. He examined the fittings of the car, as luxurious, probably, as money could make them. A week before he had drawn the pay check which had enabled him to return to New York. For a month he had worked in a Baltimore shipyard, as a common laborer; and had lived in an incredibly uncomfortable boarding-house. The contrast amused him. He laughed, aloud.

"Shades of Horatio Alger, Jr.!" he muttered.

When the owner of the car returned—it was hardly fifteen minutes—he carried a heavy suitcase. Staggering almost, he hurried to place it in the rear of the machine.

There, he covered it carefully with the robes and sought to make it as inconspicuous as possible. Then he took his seat in front with Jack.

"You—you are sure you have nothing to do—"

Jack, starting the engine, shook his head.

"If—if I pointed out the roads—"

"I know every road, every lane—" laughing—"within two hundred miles of New York City in any direction!"

"Then—if you know the way to White Plains—Mt. Kisco—Brewster?"

"Yessir!"

In a moment they were under way. Upper Broadway was changed only here and there to Jack; Van Cortlandt Park seemed the same as the day he had driven around and around interminably, reaching the decision to abandon his prospects and sacrifice his success.

Now his act seemed cowardly to him. At that time he had felt that he could not, under any circumstances, stay and face his friends and business associates. He had double-checked the plans for the building. His was the responsibility, since it was his reputation on which the owners had banked. Because he had never made a mistake he—because of a growing fear that he might do so some day—had gone over his figures twice.

Yet the roof had collapsed, a huge foundry span, and two men had been killed outright while a number of others had been seriously injured. The stresses had been miscalculated! And—

He was recalled to present things by his passenger. They had mounted out of the park into the road to White Plains.

"If—if you could go fast—very, very fast—"

Smiling, Jack depressed the throttle joyously. It had been dusk as they started and dark as they entered the park. In fast night driving there is a keen thrill known only to the motorist. He need not know his road. With his lights bright, his nerves steady, and his motor running smoothly, there it little danger. The light ahead is a better warning than a horn in the daylight. The curves, with practice, may be judged with a fine accuracy. Above all, the mant-

ling darkness lifts him up, holds him aloof—he is sailing through the air, literally unconscious of the road beneath his wheels.

In White Plains itself they slowed, and again in Mt. Kisco. When they rolled up the sharp hill into Brewster and stopped, Jack turned to his companion inquiringly.

"Straight—straight ahead—" were the directions.

About two miles out, at an obscure fork, they took a little used road and at the top of a hill overlooking a small house—presumably a farmhouse—they stopped.

"Put out your lights, and—and wait for me!"

There was a little more of decision in the older man's voice. He took the suitcase from the rear of the car and trudged down toward the house. In the faint light from a moon not quite at its first quarter Jack could see him staggering under the weight. Four, five times he sat down to rest. Finally he arrived at the house and almost a moment later started back up the incline. Five minutes found him back in his seat.

"Of course—" he was puffing, distinctly out of breath—"you will—say nothing—of this—"

Jack smiled and started the engine. As he backed around he put on the headlights again.

"It's of no interest to me whatever," he answered. "Shall I take you back to West End Avenue?"

"If—if you don't mind—" And, as they reached the main road: "If—if you could drive just a little slower—"

At a normal speed there was no need of keen alertness of every faculty. Somehow, the car always brought Jack back to his past, and his mind wandered to the day of his flight.

There had been no good-bys. His work had been at once his mistress and his best friend. In his ambition he had found companionship. With his confidence in his own brain processes gone he was like a ship without a helmsman, an athletic team without a coach. To him it seemed he must find work where there would be no responsibility, a routine position in some place where he was unknown. He had been proud of his success. Now, a failure, pride

demanded that he drop from sight, bury himself completely.

He landed, in succession, several clerical positions, but was unable to hold one of them. There was nothing to catch his interest. A mind trained to plan huge industrial plants, a mental vision capable of holding a complete modern foundry and shuffling the parts about for the gaining of the greatest efficiency—such was as unsuited for the adding of totals in a grocery bill, or balancing the petty cash of a bakery, as a multiple web printing press would be for the making of theater tickets.

Discouraged, he had a flash of inspiration. With his knowledge and experience he belonged in a smelting plant, or a foundry, or an iron or brass works. He saw that he would have to turn to work with his hands, and believed he could rise to a foremanship, a management.

But again he found himself unfitted. The training of his mind had been at the expense of bodily development. In the university he had sacrificed a fundamental love for athletics to a winning of honors. Even in his professional life he had made sleep and rest and recreation secondary considerations. He lost, one after the other, a dozen jobs. His Phi Beta Kappa key was as useless as the full dress suit in the bottom of his trunk—more so, in fact, because the latter he pawned eventually.

From city to city he drifted, a mental derelict; his view of life and his estimation of himself warped by a stubborn pride. Slowly he hardened, but not sufficiently. Then came the war, and he saw a chance to be of service. He enlisted promptly.

In the army he found himself in a new world and in its routine he discovered a place for himself. The scientific training put him in condition, and the basic keenness of his mind won him a corporal's chevrons in short order. Enthusiastic, he pictured the showing his company would make when brought face to face with the enemy. But—one of the inexplicable details in military management at Washington—his regiment was the only regular army infantry unit never to be ordered abroad. The regiment was never even mobilized.

He "put in" for officers' training camp.

and it took one year for his application to go through. Brown, hard, alert, he arrived at the school determined to win a commission with high honors; then get overseas.

On the drill field and in the class-room he stood out from his fellows. There seemed to be every indication that his university experience would be repeated. He foresaw his own triumph.

Finally, after drill tactics, and hygiene, bayonet and gas-mask and rifle practice, deployment and reconnoitering and a host of varied detail, there came—toward the end of the course—map-making. Equipped with tripods and boards and mil and stride scales, the candidates were sent out to diagram a given plot of ground several acres in extent. It was necessary first to circle the boundaries of the tract; then fill in the minutia of contour and drainage, of houses, fields, and brush, of roads and fences and barriers.

It was in the nature of an examination. Without the ability to read and make maps no commission would be given. Jack's standing in everything else made it a matter of no question if his mapping was good. He proposed to turn in the best one of his class. He started out, humming a tune under his breath and measuring his angles with meticulous care.

The completion of the initial circuit is comparatively easy. But Jack, attempting to reproduce every little curve of the road faithfully, gave himself too many angles. Sighting along a board with the naked eye has none of the accuracy of running a line with a transit. When he returned to his starting place he found his lines had failed to meet by over half a mile. Of the class, he was probably "out" the most.

The highest form of mental efficiency is not that which never makes a mistake, but rather that which, losing no time through over-cautiousness or fear of errors, assumes their possibility and probability, and catches and corrects them quickly. Had Jack cultivated a wider perspective in the study of a blueprint, and had he worried less over its minor detail, the roof of the foundry in Cleveland might never have collapsed.

Army map-making is a rough and ready method of achieving quick, approximate results. Jack could have bent his lines to force a meeting and turned at once to the mass of detail to be located within the area. His result would have been approximately correct. His standing would have remained exceptionally high.

Instead, coloring hotly at the proof of his inaccuracy when accuracy was impossible, he started out again slavishly to rectify each angle, and so used up all his time. At the end of his second circuit he was still "out" the half-mile.

The armistice saved him the knowledge of whether he won or lost his commission. The class, due for graduation on December 15th, was discharged to civil life on November 23rd.

For a while he drifted again. Then, in the Baltimore shipyard, he received his lesson. Working as a common laborer, he was one of a gang engaged in rearranging a mass of heavy castings in the foundry yard. A large electric crane, overhead, lifted and dropped them into place with striking rapidity, the men arranging the chains for hoisting and steadyng the pieces as they were lowered.

Suddenly the operator in the crane miscalculated, and dropped a motor block into the center of the gang with a sickening, non-resonant crash, catching the arm of one man and crushing it utterly.

The foreman pushed through the excited group as the victim was extricated and rushed to the company hospital. Red-faced, he called the man from above, discharging him summarily. The superintendent, who happened to be in the foundry, intervened.

He faced the man, who was pale and trembling visibly. "You've been with us for a long time, John! You can stay, but I will put you on another crane. The men here would be nervous, and you would be ill-at-ease yourself!"

"B-but—" the foreman, indignant, stammered—"the fellow will lose his arm, Mr. McKenney; and—"

"Every one makes mistakes!" The superintendent was firm. "John here will be less likely to drop anything on anybody now than a new man; can't you see that? He's

not been a drinking man, nor a careless worker!"

Jack, all at once, saw the light. He realized for the first time that it would be impossible to go through life without making errors, and he grasped the truth that a real man is steeled and matured by his miscalculations. In that moment he decided that, after all, he was a high-class engineer; and such he should be. It had been a very foolish pride which had held him under for four years. The Cleveland collapse would have hurt him, but he would have been able to live it down. There was no reason why he should not return now and face the people he knew. He would find a way, and he would start all over.

"I—I suppose you are hungry, and—"

Jack was, and it was a welcome interruption to the reverie. Yet it was hard to realize he was in New York again. He nodded affirmatively.

His companion looked at his watch, a bulky, heavy affair. "I'm hungry, myself, and—if you wouldn't object to joining me—"

Jack was reentering the city by way of the Grand Concourse. He had no conscious recollection of the return trip from the moment he left Brewster. "Where shall I drive?" he asked.

"There's—there's a quiet little place at One Hundred and Fourth and Columbus—"

Half an hour later they entered the Elysian and found a corner in the men's café. Jack now had his first opportunity to study this somewhat mysterious and rather inarticulate companion. To the eye the man across the table did not give the impression of incompetency gained from his peculiarity of speech. He was red-faced, but there were lines of strength about the mouth, and the eyes—gray—were cool and suggested beneath their easy poise an underlying sense of humor.

Jack was not sure, as he met the gaze of the other, that he was not in some way being laughed at. He remembered, suddenly, the look he had caught when glancing at the car on the ferry. Then, he was positive, he had caused the owner of the car distinct amusement.

"What is your name?" the older man asked suddenly.

"Wells!" hesitating, then taking the plunge: "Jackson Wells!"

"Mr. Wells—" the name apparently had meant nothing to him—"you have been of service to me to-night—much more than you realize—" He stopped, grunting as he extracted a purse from his hip pocket. From it he took a bill and pushed it toward Jack. "If this will recompense you—" a touch of eagerness—"and, of course, you'll say nothing—"

Jack looked at the bill. It was a hundred dollars. Into his mind flashed the picture of the needed attentions to his clothes—the loose sole of his shoe had flapped embarrassingly when he entered the café—but he was Jackson Wells, an engineer of former standing. Two weeks before he would have pocketed it gratefully, eagerly. Now he pushed it back.

"I couldn't think of taking anything, Mr.—"

"Dupree! Clarence Dupree!"

"Mr. Dupree! I am mighty glad I could be of assistance!"

"Then—" The man's voice, in his disappointment, trailed off more dismally than ever. He pocketed the bill carefully. All at once he brightened and turned to Jack again. "Perhaps I could offer you a position—I need a chauffeur, badly, and—"

Jack shook his head. It was a temptation. To become a chauffeur was one thing that had never occurred to him. It meant a living, and a solution of his immediate difficulties. His work as an engineer was not a tangible routine he could take up again in a moment. A free lance always, it might be days or weeks before he would get his first commission. Checks for his fees would not follow until after that.

But a chauffeur! No! He was Jackson Wells, consulting structural and metallurgical engineer, and America's leading expert on foundry construction. He could hardly accept a job driving a car, shoeless or no.

"I appreciate your offer, Mr. Dupree!" he explained, "but I'm not looking for a position."

The waiter brought their first course, and for some time they were silent. But Du-

pree was worried. From time to time he looked at Jack. His brow wrinkled, producing a weird effect because of the roundness of his head, and an egg-like baldness.

"There must be something I can do—" he complained.

A second course succeeded the first. Then into Jack's head popped an idea so bizarre that he chuckled aloud, and Dupree brightened again.

"You—you have thought of something I can do—" he suggested.

"Have you any one closely related to you whose clothes I could wear?"

Dupree smiled. Perhaps he had noticed Jack's attire, after all. "You will not accept anything, but if you could borrow some clothes—"

"If I could just get decently outfitted for a few days—" Jack became enthusiastic, and in his enthusiasm adopted the other's mode of expression: "If I could look like something for only a week—I've got to meet people I used to know to get started—and I've got to loaf around the Astor and the Knickerbocker and the Chemists' Club until I bump into something—" Then his smile faded. Of course, it would not be as easy as all that.

Dupree, however, leaned forward on the table. "I've got a nephew living with me, and you're about his size, Mr. Wells"—a verifying glance—"he's out of town, and I'm leaving to-morrow for a week, and"—suddenly eager—"suppose you come to the apartment to-morrow morning and make yourself at home and wear John's clothes for a week, and—and get your start—I'll be repaying you—"

"But you can't trust me that way!" On second thought it seemed an imposition. Jack could not put himself under such an obligation.

"Our man, Oscar, is an ex-pugilist—"

At that Jack laughed. "Oscar will take care of your interests, you mean!"

Dupree nodded. He would take no refusal, and it was finally arranged that Jack should live in the rooms and use the nephew's wardrobe for just exactly a week. Oscar would select and put out the necessary things.

Jack spent the night in a cheap lodging-

house and the next morning met his benefactor by appointment. The rooms were not in the West End apartment, but in a new building on Fifth Avenue in the Seventies. Oscar, to all outward appearances, was a mild-mannered individual. Before Dupree would leave them Jack had to outfit himself, to see if everything was all right, even to the fit of the shoes, the latter being the correct length and just a shade too wide. Then Dupree drew Jack aside and pressed a roll of bills in his hand.

"You—you'll need pocket money as well as clothes, Mr. Wells, and this—this is a loan—"

Jack for a moment was nonplussed. Then he looked the older man in the eye. "Why should you take this interest in me? Why should you go to all this trouble?"

Dupree laughed. He radiated delight. "You have no idea of the service you were to me the other night." For once his voice didn't trail.

Jack started out, but he did not go at once to his old haunts. He found a quiet place for a bit of breakfast and a chance to think. The last of his own funds had gone for a shave, a clean collar, his room, and the stitching of his torn shoe—a bit of repairing at which the shoemaker had shaken his head dubiously. He needed the breakfast, but most of all he wanted to think; to decide on a plan.

What was Dupree's game? There was always the hypothesis that he was a criminal, engaged in something in which he hoped to involve Jack, but that Jack dismissed. Intuitively he felt it was wrong. Yet there was a mystery, unless Dupree was a miracle of gratitude.

Clad from head to foot in immaculate clothing, he felt a different man. Whatever the motive of the other, it was Jack's chance, and he proposed to take advantage of it. First he went to the Chemist's Club, and it seemed as if the gods were with him. Hardly was he in the door, receiving the surprised welcome of several of the employees whose terms of service went back beyond the four years, when Stevens, a young contractor, rushed up and seized him by the arm.

"Jackson Wells! The very man I want

to see!" There was no reference to the Cleveland fiasco—no thought of it, apparently—and no question of the long absence, long in a profession where some out-of-the-way job may carry an engineer away for a year or more.

"We've got the contract for a new foundry in Bridgeport," Stevens hurried on to explain, "and not only are we short of ground space but we have to build while we keep the old foundry in operation." He carried Wells into the elevator with him, headed for his room. "We've had a couple of men on the job, including an underpinning expert, but—hang it, Wells—you're the only man in the country to straighten us out!"

By noon Jack had closed a tentative agreement with Stevens. Word of his return had been noised about the club, and an R. T. Workmaster, representing a St. Louis firm, had made an appointment for the evening. A huge industrial plant in that city was about to enlarge and rebuild. The following day was to be spent with Stevens, and, if everything went well, the following week would take him to Bridgeport. Singularly elated, Jack stole away for a view of the city and its changes, and his steps took him toward the Astor.

In the lobby of that hotel the typical New Yorker saunters up and meets himself, by chance or by appointment. At the height of his success Jackson Wells had been a familiar figure in the café and the corridors. Now he wanted to see if he should find, by any freak of coincidence, some one of his old acquaintances. He threaded ways still familiar, and finally ensconced himself in one of the cozy chairs close to the entrance to the dining-room, where he could view all those entering.

What luck was his this morning! Had he been in his own garments, even though shaved and with a new collar, would he have dared enter the club in the first place, and would Stevens have accepted him so readily? How far was his success due to his appearance of success?

He smiled as he thought that these clothes, or more like them, were his for a week. For a week he had an address on upper Fifth Avenue. In that time he surely

would be well upon the road to fortune and standing. He had never dared hope for this. No story of Alger's would have seemed more improbable. All at once he was conscious of the approach of a strikingly pretty girl, down the alley between the chairs, a pleasing interruption to his varied reflections.

Although it was early in the season, she wore her furs—a long coat of silver fox, fitting snugly at the neck and cut to the trim slenderness of her figure. Her hat, a gray-feathered toque, almost but not quite masked hair of the color of brass in a lathe. Her eyes were blue, her coloring a rich olive, her lips full-blooded. She came right up to him and put two tiny white-gloved hands on his shoulders.

"Jackson Wells!" she exclaimed.

For a moment he was surprised and nonplussed. He did not recognize her. Then he jumped to his feet.

"Mary Carroll!" He smiled as he matched her form of address.

"You know," she explained, "this is perfectly splendid, meeting you! You're not doing a thing—don't tell me you are—and I have two entirely useless matinee tickets unless you will have mercy on me, and besides, there's everything you've got to tell me before I let you go!"

He took her arm. It seemed quite natural after four years. "We can't talk much at a matinee!" he hazarded.

"Indeed, yes!" she rejoined. "This is a comic opera revival!"

He was aware of many glances of admiration as he escorted her through the lobby. In his memory, as he called her up now, the last picture of her was at a dinner and dance in this very hotel. She had worn a simple evening gown of blue, trimmed with a darker blue. No one in the ballroom had possessed half her beauty, and he—

Jackson Wells flushed as he helped her into a taxi. In four years he had learned many things, and it was not pleasant to look back upon his own blindness. In his life in lodging-houses and cheap boarding places he had lost his sense of aloofness, and had gained an appreciation of woman at her best. The slattern had disgusted him.

But many a lonely night he had watched

some bright-faced, clear-eyed girl, wishing himself in place of the young fellow of her choice. At times, when out of work, he had sat in the kitchen of his home of the moment; and once, when sick, he had been mothered by the buxom widow from whom he rented a room—and from these good souls he had received the material for a rebuilding of his viewpoint.

On the night of the dinner he had taken Mary home. She had been flushed from the dancing, possessed of the animation of joyous youth. His mind had been intent upon the results of his talk to the assembled metallurgists—it was a professional affair—and he could see now how little attention he had paid her, how he had quenched her spirits. A number of times before he had been her escort, but—he had been intent upon his own plans and ambitions and projects always. She had never even entered his thoughts, when away from her. What a fool he had been!

At the theater she questioned him, and he replied without admitting to the full his four years of sulking. After a bit he succeeded in diverting the conversation to herself, where he kept it. The play, which held them in spots, was over finally, and she turned to him in the lobby.

"And now, busy man, can I—dare I—ask you to take me to supper!" She smiled, most alluringly, tucking her hand beneath his arm.

"You can ask me for anything!" he replied. "I'll even design you a little foundry or smelting plant all your own, but"—teasingly—"I've got to start talking to a man named Workmaster at eight-thirty sharp on rather important business!"

They dined down at the Lafayette, a place of memories to both of them. Through seven courses she endeavored to get from him the whole story of his exile, but with scant success. Finally, over the biscuit tortoni, she leaned two dimpled elbows upon the table.

"Jack!" speculatively. "You've improved!"

"Meaning?"

"You used to be a thinking machine, and now—"

"Yes?"

"You're becoming, actually"—giggling—"a human being!"

"Can—" he hesitated, then took the step—"can you take a human being seriously?" He leaned forward with a real earnestness.

She sobered. "When I'm assured there's to be no relapse, why, perhaps—" A sudden riot of color suffused her face. She had not expected this from him, at least, so suddenly.

"Perhaps—" He echoed her last word. He had come to New York prepared to make up for all his past omissions. Mary was one of them. He was determined to build for the future solidly this time. Mary was revealed to him suddenly as an essential cornerstone. Until she had put her hands upon his shoulders in the hotel he had not thought of her, but he was none the less sincere. It was simply that a subconscious love had suddenly become intensely objective.

She glanced at her wrist watch. "You will have to hurry," she said, "to talk to Mr. Workmaster at eight-thirty!"

When a man ceases to be a buffeted plaything of fate and begins to push his own destiny, it seems as if everything breaks for him at once. Later he may have trouble, but just after the turning point he is apt to have an amazing sort of beginner's luck.

Jack closed the St. Louis deal with Workmaster without trouble. The following day he completed his arrangements with Stevens. Before two days more had passed he had signed five agreements for work which would keep him steadily employed—rushed—until spring. Not once was his Cleveland mistake mentioned.

Every evening the imperturbable Oscar waited up for him, or laid out dress clothes if he came home before dinner and required them. Every morning a different business suit was ready. For the first two days his conscience bothered him. By the sixth he had managed to collect one advance fee and outfit himself. The seventh day he sallied forth in his own habiliments, informing Oscar he would not return.

The mysterious Mr. Dupree had not appeared. Too busy to wonder further at the motives behind that gentleman's generosity,

Jack wrote him politely at the apartment address, thanking him, and enclosing the amount of the loan.

In the resumption of his work Jack found a keen delight, but he was mostly interested in Mary. The girl, caught once off her guard, was extremely careful with him; but he saw her every night. Radiantly beautiful, she fascinated him. With an ability to talk on any subject, she caught and held his admiration. Together they dined, took in some show, and went to a cabaret afterwards. Of his love she could have no doubt, and he was pretty sure of her. But the subject remained taboo.

On the day he came down on the bus in his own new clothes, and arranged for his quarters at the Chemists' Club, she invited him to her home for dinner. That, he thought, meant an end of his probation. He had phoned her as usual, and, never having had her street address, he asked for it. As he wrote it down he smiled, reminiscently. She lived on West End Avenue.

He wondered, on the trip up, whether others would be present. He remembered in a dim sort of way that her father was retired, and that she had a brother.

The taxi stopped and as he looked at the apartment building he gasped with surprise. It was the same one from which Dupree had taken the suitcase. Here was a coincidence!

She greeted him at the door. "We'll be alone, Jack, except for uncle! He's perfectly absurd, but you'll like him!"

She led the way in and stood aside. He entered the room, and none other than Dupree himself rose to greet him.

"Mr. Wells, I'm glad to see you, and—"

Jack sank into a chair. His eyes travelled helplessly from Dupree to Mary. Mary, puzzled, turned to her uncle.

"Have you met Jack before, uncle?"

"You introduced him to me once yourself, Mary, four years ago, when he hadn't sense enough to know a good-looking girl when he saw one, and—" Dupree's eyes rolled around to Jack's with a twinkle, and his mouth dropped with humorous anticipation.

She flushed. "Was Jack the young man you recognized on the ferry from Jersey,

who didn't recognize you; the one you wanted to talk to and for whose benefit you pretended you were unable to handle your car?"

"He looked down at the heel—I knew if he had the stuff in him he would step up and offer his help, and—"

"And—" she mimicked. She faced Jack. "Uncle's the best driver in New York City—for a man of his age and foolishness! That vacuum tank clogs every once in a while, and he knew what to do! But instead of calling you by name he preferred to hold up the ferry full of machines!"

Angry, she confronted her uncle again. "Now I know why you acted so peculiarly and kept me hanging around the Astor, and then deserted me and left me flat with the tickets to that matinee. How could you be sure I'd walk down that particular alley and see Jack? I might not have recognized him. Bah!"

Jack suddenly gathered his wits and regained the use of his tongue. He rose and took Dupree by the arm. "The clothes!" he queried. "Who is your nephew?"

Dupree actually grinned. "Her brother!"

"And the apartment, and Oscar?"

"His!"

Mary took Jack's arm. "Come on! Uncle's had his little joke, and now I want to show you our view!"

Jack, however, had one more question, and he turned in the doorway. "What was in the suitcase?"

"Firebrick, my boy! They were fixing the flue—This is a new building, but the flue was defective, and I thought—"

Mary, however, took Jack by the coat-tails. "Come on! Uncle thinks he's an actor! That was all put on, Jack! He wanted to see what you would do!" She smiled suddenly. "Now that he's put the seal of approval on you—"

In the course of time, in the other room—before dinner, but why not—he asked her an important question and her answer, previously considered, was prompt.

"Yes, Jack!"

Nestling, she had something to add. "Isn't uncle perfectly absurd?" she asked.



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